

The Shape of Abstraction

SELECTIONS FROM THE OLLIE COLLECTION



The Shape of Abstraction

SELECTIONS FROM THE OLLIE COLLECTION

edited by Elizabeth Wyckoff and Simon Kelly

essay by Rehema C. Barber

interview with Ronald Maurice Ollie

catalogue entries by

Alexis Assam, Heather A. Hughes, Hannah Klemm, Molly Moog, Gretchen L. Wagner, and Abigail Yoder

featuring a poem by Quincy Troupe

SAINT LOUIS ART MUSEUM

This book is published in conjunction with the exhibition *The Shape of Abstraction: Selections from the Ollie Collection*, presented at the Saint Louis Art Museum from September 17, 2019, to March 8, 2020.

Copyright © 2019 Saint Louis Art Museum

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

Saint Louis Art Museum One Fine Arts Drive, Forest Park St. Louis, MO 63110 USA www.slam.org

Edited by Monica S. Rumsey Art direction and design by Jon Cournoyer Production by Lauri Kramer Publication management by Rachel Swiston Proofread by Jane Friedman

Printed by The Printing Source
The book is typeset in Scala Sans Pro. The paper is Sterling silk 100# text, 120# cover.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: St. Louis Art Museum, author. | Wyckoff, Elizabeth, editor. | Kelly, Simon (Simon R.), editor.

Title: The shape of abstraction: selections from the Ollie collection / edited by Elizabeth Wyckoff and Simon Kelly; interview with Ronald Ollie; essay by Rehema C. Barber; catalogue entries by Alexis Assam, Heather Hughes, Hannah Klemm, Molly Moog, Gretchen L. Wagner, Abigail Yoder; featuring a poem by Quincy Troupe.

Description: St. Louis, MO: Saint Louis Art Museum, 2019. | "This book is published in conjunction with the exhibition The Shape of Abstraction: Selections from the Ollie Collection, presented at the Saint Louis Art Museum from September 17, 2019 to March 8, 2020." | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019020415 | ISBN 9780891780045 (pbk.)
Subjects: LCSH: African American art--Exhibitions. | Art, Abstract--United States--Exhibitions. | Ollie, Ronald--Art collections--Exhibitions. |
Ollie, Monique McRipley--Art collections--Exhibitions. | Art--Private collections--Missouri--Saint Louis--Exhibitions. | St. Louis Art Museum--Exhibitions.
Classification: LCC N6538.N5 S7 2019 | DDC 700.89/96073--dc23

LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2019020415
ISBN 978-0-89178-004-5

Contents

- 6 Director's Foreword
- 9 A Conversation with Ronald Ollie Simon Kelly, Ronald Maurice Ollie, and Elizabeth Wyckoff
- 14 **The Shape of Abstraction;** *for Ron Ollie* Quincy Troupe
- 16 Unsung Abstractions, A Legacy Uncovered

Rehema C. Barber

23 Catalogue

Alexis Assam, Heather A. Hughes, Hannah Klemm, Molly Moog, Gretchen L. Wagner, and Abigail Yoder

- 63 Checklist of the Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection
- 64 Photo Credits

Director's Foreword

The Shape of Abstraction: Selections from the Ollie Collection celebrates the extraordinary gift of 81 works of art that form the Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection at the Saint Louis Art Museum. This gift, from Ronald Maurice Ollie and Monique McRipley Ollie, honors multiple generations of African American artists and artists of Caribbean descent who have resolutely pursued abstraction. Highlights include a luminous oil on paper drawing (1966) by Norman Lewis, an innovative draped canvas (1975) and a sculpture (2000) by Sam Gilliam, and a print (2014) by mid-career sculptor Chakaia Booker.

Abstraction is among the defining characteristics of modern and contemporary art and is present throughout the Museum's galleries. The Ollie collection does far more than enhance an existing strength, however. It places the Museum squarely within an expanding field of exploration, as the narratives around the history of abstraction grow more inclusive and heterogeneous. This gift illuminates the diverse body of abstract work made by black artists, whose profound contributions in this mode of expression have begun to receive greater recognition. While these artists are involved in the larger histories of abstraction, they are also engaged in a wide-ranging dialogue with African American peers whose focus on figuration more clearly emphasizes identity and social justice issues.

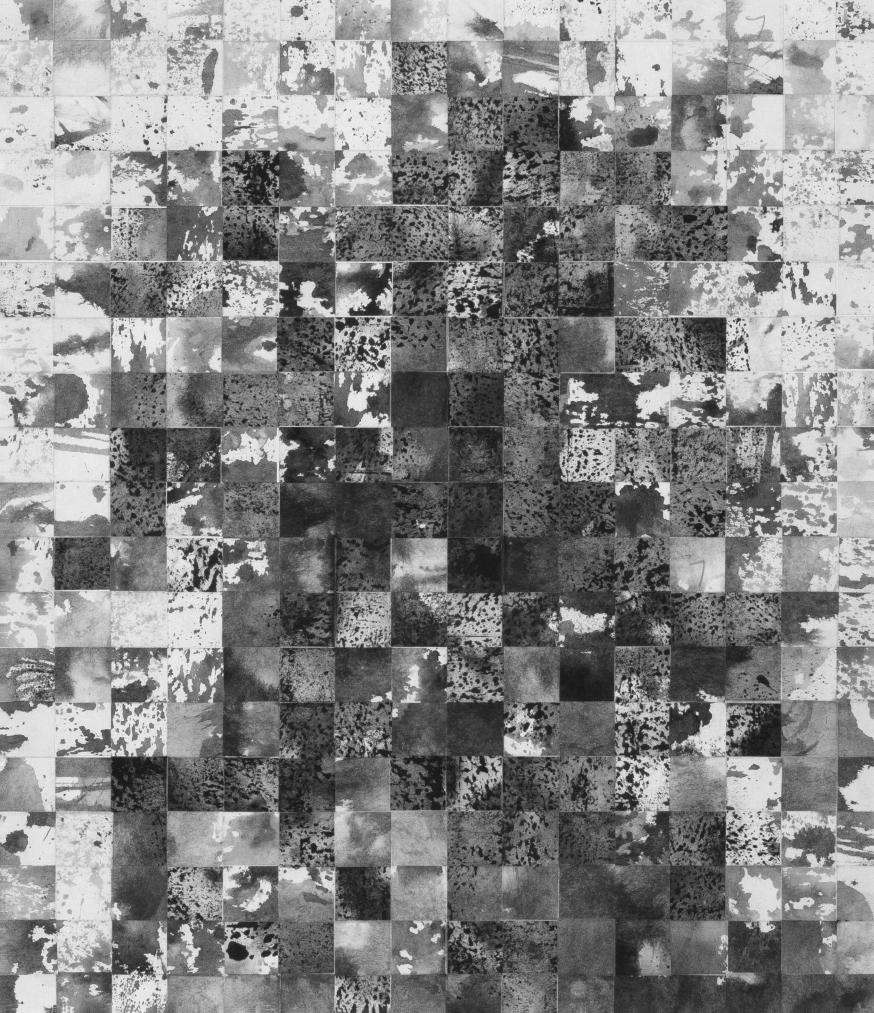
Ron Ollie grew up in St. Louis and began visiting the Art Museum as a child with his parents. This gift in their memory pays tribute to his family and his childhood experience here, and reinforces Ron and Monique's commitment to education and exposure to the arts. Their gift also includes photographs by a number of

prominent African American photographers, as well as a research archive containing a trove of often rare catalogues and other topically specific literature that enhances opportunities for current and future scholarship in the field.

The poem that provided the title for the exhibition and catalogue was written at Ron's request by another talented son of St. Louis, Quincy Troupe. We thank both Ron and Quincy, who share a passion for abstract art, for this contribution. We are also grateful to Rehema C. Barber, chief curator of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts and 2001 Romare Bearden Fellow at the Saint Louis Art Museum, whose essay situates the Ollie collection within a rapidly growing body of scholarly discourse.

The Museum is deeply indebted to the Ollies for this remarkable gift and for their confidence in the Museum's stewardship of their collection. The catalogue is the result of careful attention by a number of members of the curatorial staff working across departments. The exhibition that this catalogue accompanies was co-curated by Gretchen L. Wagner, the Andrew W. Mellon Fellow in prints, drawings, and photographs and Alexis Assam, the 2018–19 Romare Bearden Graduate Museum Fellow. We are also grateful to the Trio Foundation of St. Louis for its support of the exhibition and its related programs.

Brent R. Benjamin The Barbara B. Taylor Director





A Conversation with Ronald Ollie

The following dialogue is based on a longer conversation that took place on February 6, 2019, between the collector, Ronald Ollie; Simon Kelly, curator of modern and contemporary art at the Saint Louis Art Museum; and Elizabeth Wyckoff, the Museum's curator of prints, drawings, and photographs.

EW Ron, could you please tell us about how your appreciation of abstract art began?

RO Well, I started out loving art through my early exposure to it. I recently found a drawing that I did when I was in kindergarten: it is abstract, which I just love. As I grew older, though, I was more intimidated about art, until in the sixth grade a fellow student, William Burch, introduced me to the concept of abstract art, and it was freeing. I could use all kinds of different colors and gestures, and I fell in love with abstract art. In retrospect, I realize that was the moment when I embraced abstract art.

As an adult, I started going to the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Met, and the Whitney, and I started seeing works by abstract artists. I fell in love with the abstract expressionists, Rothko, Pollock, de Kooning, and Franz Kline. When I would go to a museum and see art that I liked, I would leave feeling so wonderful and wanting more. Long ago, I came across a quote that has stayed with me: "Art is here to get us through life. That's its only purpose."

SK What was your occupation, which enabled you to collect?

RO I am a mechanical engineer by training, and my jobs—first as a sales engineer and then in business development—took me across the country, from Kansas City to New York, to San Francisco, and back to New York. I traveled a lot for work, which gave me the time to go to art galleries and bookstores. I went to museums in every city I visited. In fact, one of my earliest art purchases came through a professional contact: When I was working for Rohm and Haas (a manufacturer of Plexiglas acrylic), the father of one of my customers was a sculptor, Mort Maverick. I acquired four of his acrylic sculptures.

EW Can you talk about the evolution of your collecting?

RO It was my introduction to the art advisor Joan Allen in New York and her Arts Alliance that really got me involved with buying art. She organized studio visits and held art auctions. With her, I visited the studios of Herbert Gentry, Ed Clark, and Al Loving, among others, and I would buy a piece here and there. At the time, I did not think of myself as a collector, but I liked the experience of going to the studios and talking to the artists. When I met Herb Gentry through Joan, he opened the whole art world up to me. We would go to the Chelsea Square Restaurant, which was our Cedar Tavern [the Greenwich Village bar that was the iconic gathering place of the abstract expressionist generation], and we would talk for hours, with other artists as well, like Ed Clark and Bob Blackburn [fig. 1].

Meeting George N'Namdi, who has a gallery in Detroit, opened up another stage for me. This was Herb's influence. He said, "You got to meet N'Namdi." George said to me, "I'm not just going to sell you one piece of art. I build collectors. If you buy from me, you're going to buy several pieces at once. You'll give me a down payment and you'll have an art bill." I was intrigued, and since at that time I had received a modest inheritance from my mother, I was able to make a down payment.

As I got serious about collecting art, I realized that I needed to document my collection, and I also wanted to build an archive of research materials. I would like to acknowledge all the hard work that Bethany Widrich, registrar, and Malcolm Harris, archivist, have done to help me realize that goal.



Fig. 1. The Chelsea Square Restaurant, New York City, showing left to right: (front row) Mel Edwards, Ronald Ollie, Ed Clark, Beryl Basham, Daryl A. Basham, Nanette Carter, Herbert Gentry, Mary Anne Rose Gentry; (back row) William T. Williams, Kysim Bymoe, Berry Johnson, and Al Loving, late 1990s

SK You've bought a lot directly from artists. Can you talk about that?

RO I loved buying the pieces and putting them on the wall. But getting to know the artists as people, getting to understand their work and their lives, and having them take an interest in me and helping me develop as a collector, introducing me to other artists, all of that added another dimension. Ed Clark would advise me about museums to visit in Europe. He took me to Frank Bowling's studio one time when Frank was on his way to England for the summer. I bought a piece, and he told me not to pay him, but instead to pay his rent while he was gone. I did that two summers in a row.

SK Can you tell us about your relationship with Sam Gilliam?

RO Yes, I went to his studio in Washington, D.C. and walked up the stairs to this huge, huge space. Sam was very serious but very nice, a very elegant man. He showed me his work and I fixated on one piece, the hinged wall relief sculpture, which is now in the Museum's collection [checklist 46]. At the time I was working in Washington two days a week, so I would sometimes just hang out with Sam and he would tell me about exhibitions and how he got started with the draped canvases. That was part of the interaction that I just loved: to be able to talk to the artists about their lives and art and how their work evolved.

EW Talking with the artists, was there discussion about the fact that much of the art world was not paying attention to their work?

RO Oh yeah. All the time. They felt like they were just as good as the artists who were getting the recognition. They knew those artists, and they felt like they were being overlooked, but I think it gave them even more determination to do their work. Ed Clark would tell me, "Look, I don't care if a museum has my art right now," he said, "I know I'm good. I know eventually they're going to catch up to me. I'm just going to do the work in the studio and that's where my focus is going to be."

EW What about the recent attention many of them are getting?

RO I'm so happy for them—and for me. I feel vindicated. What they told me was true, and I didn't think it was going to happen so quickly. With my collecting, and with this gift, I wanted to honor these artists. It is also thrilling that there are now so many more publications—since,

as you know, I also collect books and other research materials for the archives.

SK Can you talk about the themes you see in your collection?

RO Well, one of them is process. For example, I remember one time visiting Ed Clark's studio, when he actually demonstrated how he painted, pouring the liquid acrylic and mixing it with dry pigment. He would mix the various colors with the brush and then the broom, and he showed how he would do the stroke. It was fascinating, as an engineer, just to see the process—a lot of these guys were almost chemists. I know Jack Whitten made a lot of his own materials, which was interesting to me because of my technical interest.

Also I love layers, like in Frank Wimberley's work. I love color and gestures in the work. I love abstract expressionism very much. Some work I have is very carefully conceived, and I like that—like the James Little painting [cat. 12]—very, very much. But I also love spontaneity, action painting.

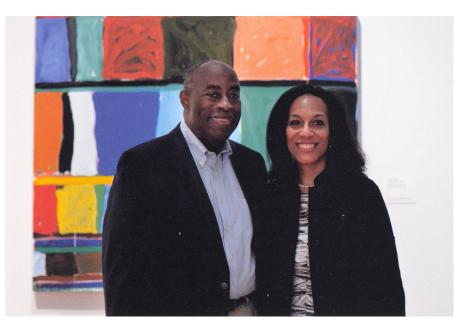


Fig. 2. Ronald and Monique Ollie

EW What about connections between your interests in music and abstract art?

RO Oh, definitely. I sing standards, musical theater, and spirituals, which I love. I even thought about being an opera singer at one time. Then, when I moved to New York in 1977, all my friends would talk about the local jazz radio station WRVR: "Oh man, I tuned into RVR," so I really got full exposure to jazz early on in New York.

Which is interesting, because I was also looking at a lot of abstract art at that time. I felt the improvisational nature of jazz was particularly suitable for abstract art. Many of the abstract artists I know listen to jazz when they paint and they name their pieces after jazz artists, or jazz themes, or jazz songs. Herb Gentry would say to me, "Jazz artists are abstract artists." He had a gallery and jazz club in Paris in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Chez Honey, named after his wife at the time, who was a jazz singer. Frank Wimberley and Miles Davis were very good friends of one another; Bob Blackburn was a friend of a number of jazz artists. That connection is definitely there.

EW How did you come to ask Quincy Troupe to write the poem that gave this exhibition and catalogue its title?

RO Quincy is from St. Louis, from my elder brother's generation. He is an acclaimed poet, who also co-wrote

Miles Davis's autobiography [Miles: The Autobiography]—he also started collecting abstract art early on. So he was a natural choice, and Bill Hutson actually encouraged me to ask him.

SK Could you give us a sense of why you dedicated the Ollie collection at the Saint Louis Art Museum to your parents, Thelma and Bert Ollie?

RO If my parents (fig. 3) hadn't exposed me early on to the arts, I wouldn't be where I am. Singing was the first real art form I embraced. We would go to the Muny opera [Municipal Theatre Association] in Forest Park starting when I was six or seven. I didn't like going there at first, but it stuck—I now love musical theater. My parents also brought me to the Art Museum, where I remember falling in love with the sculpture of Rodin.

My mother was creative herself: she made hats and was an innovative cook, with her own catering business, and she saw to it that our house was nicely decorated. My father was very supportive of my mother, my brothers and sister, and me. He wanted us to have an expansive educational experience. I used my inheritance from each of them to buy art. My life has been so greatly enriched by the arts. I can't imagine my life without the arts and it was my parents who gave that to me. That's one of the reasons I'm dedicating this to them.



Fig. 3. Thelma and Bert Ollie on their wedding day in St. Louis, January 25, 1942

The Shape of Abstraction; for Ron Ollie

by Quincy Troupe

the shape of abstraction is what the mind believes it sees, figures, colors emerging from a canvas (or a block of steel, limestone, wood chipped & cut, chiseled, shaped into a memory, sanded down, refined into grace, polished to a high sheen, almost a mirror, reflects a creative imagination, where the artist leaves their heart inside a language born from power of a hammer's head, artistry evolves from there, fertile dreams of makers are transferred in boogie-woogie riffs from bebop, deep in delta blues, live inside a clean womb, hard surfaces birthing faces, where voices scat, rap over hot jazz licks in harlem, zing original forms, create words—like razzmatatazz—sling them sluicing colors into living language—whatever raises to life & sings, shocks, or disgraces the senses—as long as we are here in the world, if it doesn't burn, or explode into wars created by man-made nuclear infernos—when horror, conflict is chosen over beauty—a brushstroke can evoke memory as love, heard sometimes in whispers),

is what a painter's brushstrokes bring to life from empty blank white wombs of canvases—they could be red, brown, black, tan, or yellow canvases—until unknown pulse beats birth embryos from there, raise them into breathing forms from deep inside creative impulses, splashed with colors, tones, as when we look up at cloud formations & see in the sky wonders, images created up there are their own music, rhythm, as when the sea rolls in clapping waves foaming, roaring, then snarling into what eye imagine mad animals might hear when suffering with rabies, on the other hand eye imagine eyeballs bulging to see what a ship way out on the infinite, razor-sharp blade edge

slicing the sea in half might mean from our view here on shore, on a gray day full of silhouettes, contours of waving figures, outlines of fluctuating images, forms dissipating inside exhaust gasses belching from a smokestack vessel's burner trailing shapes behind it as it sails eastward toward some unknown port it will reach in the dark dead moment right before midnight, a star shining bright high above in the night, is a white echo of light showing the way, or is a one-eyed cyclops blinking down from history,

they are paintings after all, disintegrating on that blue grey canvas of sky, is a rorschach test of faith, of what one thinks the eye recognizes as art, transfers back to probe the brain in an instant of volatility—which is the push & pull of capricious decision-making filled with impulsive hints of what or what not to choose when eyeing creative choices offered up as barter, in exchange for banknotes, trade, switch or swap, is a form of negotiation, is a haggling bargain point, which is an art form of sorts too, though not the same creative level of expression true art springs from—

because art is shrouded inside mystery & magic it is a force that can enrich, sustain life, nourishing through beauty, joy, mirroring truth, questioning what we know of ourselves, or don't know, asking us questions—why are we here & where will all these shapes take us to through colors splashed with beauty—or shock—where music evokes lines tap-dancing through forms, breaks into rhythms, takes us to a place where imagination wanders, fills up space with magical, mysterious wonder

Unsung Abstractions, A Legacy Uncovered

by Rehema C. Barber

You misjudge us because you do not know us.

--- W. E. B. Du Bois, 1903

These guys were innovating and we as a people, as black people have always been innovators . . . someone once told me that soul is making something out of nothing.

-Ronald Ollie, interview with the author, February 25, 2019

In 2005, while I was serving as the curatorial associate at the Amistad Center Foundation (now the Amistad Center for Art & Culture), I began reorganizing its collection of almost nine thousand objects. At one point, I came across several curious lithographs by Herbert Gentry, an artist I'd never heard of or read about in my studies.' Seeing the vibrant colors, lines, and figures in Gentry's works helped me to realize that the history of art that I had been trained to examine, interpret, and present to the vast visiting public had significant omissions. As Ron Ollie stated in a recent conversation:

These artists are important . . . there was a lot of innovation happening [within these artists' studios] and if you don't capture that, you don't tell the full story of American art . . . If you leave them out [of the story] it is like leaving out jazz in the history of American music.²

This is why the gift of the Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection to the Saint Louis Art Museum is so important, while also adding to the continued momentum of museums across the nation uncovering and celebrating these unsung pioneers and innovators of abstraction. From the gestural yet figurative abstractions of Herbert Gentry (fig. 4); to Ed Clark's push-broomed strokes of paint; to the lyrical, unstretched canvases or hinged panels by Sam Gilliam that undulate with vibrant, shimmering colors; to the alchemy of materials used by Jack Whitten; or the tire-tread-inspired abstractions of Chakaia Booker: these artists paved the path for the current generation of artists—such as Leonardo Drew, Jenny C. Jones, Adam Pendleton, and many others—to experiment with paint, materials, composition, and the method of installation for their works.

Why is it that only a few of these pioneers are known for their dazzling investigations in and contributions to American abstraction? It's not that these artists didn't have the same formal education as other European and American abstract artists of the time, or that they weren't aware of what was happening in the mainstream art academies of London, New York, or Paris. Many of them attended studio programs at such prestigious



Fig. 4. Herbert Gentry, American, 1919–2003; *Today*, 1987; screenprint; 9 13/16 × 13 11/16 in. (25 × 34.8 cm); Saint Louis Art Museum, The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection, Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 140:2017

institutions as the Art Institute of Chicago, the Art Students League, Columbia University, the Royal College of Art, or Yale University, among others. They were also contemporaries of, and sometimes circulated in the same artistic circles as, Arshile Gorky, Hans Hofmann, Joan Mitchell, Barnett Newman, Jackson Pollock, and Mark Rothko. But they weren't always invited to the table to partake in the same conversations or exhibitions as these famed artists of American and European abstraction. As art historian Sharon Patton observed:

The African-American vanguard mostly lacked the extensive sustained exposure through exhibitions, patronage and critical reviews in the press The co-operative art networks in Harlem had collapsed after World War II. Places to exhibit were virtually non-existent African-American artists lacked an advocate like [modernist art critic Clement] Greenberg, who arranged gallery contacts which helped establish . . . [Robert] Motherwell, [Mark] Rothko, and [Clyfford] Still.³

Instead, African American artists created their own networks and collectives, such as AfriCOBRA, Kamoinge, Spiral, and the Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop, among many others. These mini-societies not only provided feedback about their work or discussions about living and working in New York, Chicago, and abroad; they also opened their studios to collectors and sent these connoisseurs to other artists and colleagues they thought should be known and collected as well. While these collectives had disparate aesthetics and viewpoints about their art practices in relation to those of their white counterparts, they offered a space for reflection, innovative thinking, and exhibition opportunities.

Now, with the Saint Louis Art Museum's exhibition *The Shape of Abstraction* and other national exhibitions that are highlighting non-Euro-American abstractionists, the annals of art history are being revised and expanded. This exhibition in St. Louis represents a segment of some of the most important pioneers of American abstract art, and these artists are also of African descent. It is no accident that the works of these modern masters have



Fig. 5. Thelma, Bert, and Ron Ollie; photo taken in approximately 1952 by Walter A. Giles, St. Louis, Missouri

found a home in St. Louis or that the collection has been named after the benefactors' parents (fig. 5). Thelma Ollie was from the Mississippi Delta and Bert Ollie was from Arkansas. At age ten, in 1927, Thelma migrated to St. Louis with her family; and Bert eventually found his way to the city in his early twenties. Thelma had hoped to be a teacher, and Bert dreamed of pursuing an education at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama with Booker T. Washington. Sadly, social and financial constraints, along with the disruptions caused by the Second World War, barred them from following their dreams and so they poured their dreams and hopes into their children. As their son Ron Ollie explains:

My father just resolved that he wanted his kids to have the best education possible, and so one of the things that I think he liked about my mother was her zeal for education, a broad education. He was very open-minded to so many things in terms of what we did and the exposure we got. . . . He was very open-minded in terms of our education and part of that included the arts.⁴

This education included art camps, trips to museums, and family trips to Forest Park to see musical productions. It is only fitting that Ron and Monique Ollie have made such an unparalleled gift of these exemplary works by artists of African descent to one of the institutions that helped shape Ron's artistic education. He will tell you that he often brought friends to the Museum to get their thoughts on how the work moved them emotionally and intellectually, and this exhibition of a selection of the 81 works in the Ollie collection is sure to be emotionally and intellectually stimulating to those who encounter it, both now and in the future.

Going back to those early moments of my discovery of the Gentry lithographs in the Amistad collection reminds me of my first introduction to historians like Mary Anne Rose—the widow of Herbert Gentry and the trustee of his estate—and such artists as Benny Andrews, Frank Bowling, Ed Clark, Bill Hutson, and Frank Wimberleymany of whom are featured in The Shape of Abstraction. It was an exciting time for me to get to know them, one that felt like opening a living book: listening to them talk about their studio practices, who they worked with, where they traveled and worked. But what they always made sure to do by the end of these conversations was talk about some other artist's work and why I should try to visit them or explore that person's work. Bill Hutson is a thoughtful visual composer, who also happens to be a consummate archivist and historian. I remember Ed Clark being a sharp-witted and reflective artist, Nanette Carter as a generous and astute practitioner, and William T. Williams as a self-assured and strategic creator. Many of these qualities can be seen in the works on view in this exhibition. This is apparent in the lyrically figurative, yet somehow abstract markings of Norman Lewis, Frank Wimberley's enthralling configurations of smaller paintings within the compositional plane of one work, the dynamic and rhythmic collages of Sam Middleton (fig. 6), or in Al Loving's uniquely layered and brightly hued configurations on shaped canvases and Plexiglas. Al Loving once recalled:

When we showed together at the Studio Museum in Harlem in the early 1970s we could see that we all had arrived at a kind of abstraction that emphasized materials 5

Noted curator and art historian Richard J. Powell reveals that the "we" to which Loving was referring were artists Joe Overstreet and Howardena Pindell, as well as other artists included in the Ollie collection: Frank Bowling, Ed Clark, Sam Gilliam, Bill Hutson, Jack Whitten, and William T. Williams. This work was not being created in a vacuum, but in careful consideration of and in response to the time and place in which these artists were living. It also clearly situates these artists not as "black artists" but within the vernacular of abstraction, abstract expressionism, collage, existentialism, hard-edge painting, Négritude, minimalism, and surrealism. These works clearly demonstrate their place within modern American

art history, but they also speak to the conditions and artistic practices of artists of color from the 1940s to the present. In some ways these works are also precursors to the post-black art movement of the late 1990s, art that is intensely concerned with exploring and redefining the conditions of black people and blackness, but does not label the art or artists as "black." Powell furthers this notion with his analysis of a review published in 1959 by Jan Carew, a London-based Guyanese journalist and writer, about Aubrey Williams's abstract paintings:

In this description, Carew's juxtaposition of scientific and technological analogies with an allusion to Williams's personal ordeal as a social and political being illustrated just how malleable abstract art could be, especially when the artist was black or the context of the work evoked blackness and thus fit into an observer's preexisting social interpretation.⁶

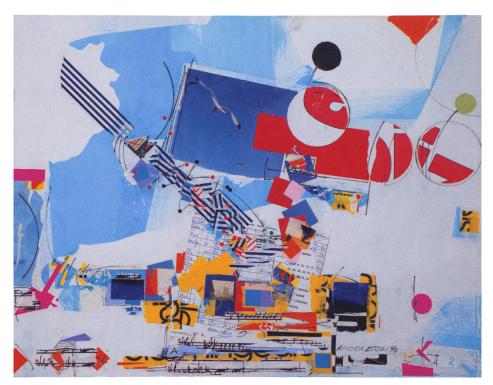


Fig. 6. Sam Middleton, American, 1927–2015; Untitled, 1990; collage of cut and torn printed and painted papers with paint and graphite; 19 $3/8 \times 25 1/8$ in. (49.2 \times 63.8 cm); Saint Louis Art Museum, The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection, Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 174:2017



Fig. 7. James Little, American, born 1952; Study for the Surrogate, 2002; watercolor with graphite; 16 3/16 \times 19 7/8 in. (41.1 \times 50.5 cm); Saint Louis Art Museum, The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection, Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 168:2017

This idea of black abstraction as a forerunner to post—black art is further underscored by examining several works in the Ollie collection. Take, for example, James Little's paintings. These are composed of his own mixture of oil paint and beeswax to create flat but electric encaustic explorations that expose various aspects and remnants of inspirations from the artist's environment, such as architecture and city signs. In works like *Study for the Surrogate* (fig. 7), Little demonstrates that not only can the medium be manipulated, but also the surface itself can be interrupted with the simplest of touches—seen in his deliberate scoring of the paper. And while social issues don't permeate his works, Little's titles may or may not refer to his cultural heritage. Says Little:

I just don't think that art has to do with that I want an American image. I am an American, and that hasn't been easy for me to say. I grew up with a lot of oppression. But I'm an optimist. American art is

what the best art should be—monumental, in that it's larger than life and arising from or exhibiting boldness, spirit, or daring. And pure, which is a paradoxical word coming from me, with my background being black, Irish, and Native American.⁷

Moreover, the bold, geometric, yet linear abstractions of William T. Williams also demonstrate how artists of the late 1960s and early '70s created works that not only used the visual language and methods of abstraction, but also represented social concerns and their experiences of that time. His works from that period were methodically constructed, but their underlying intent had cultural implications as well. Explains Williams:

I made a conscious decision to complete the forms within the frame and have the work serve as a metaphor for containment. The works have a sense of restrictiveness or of repression, and this containment is underneath all those paintings of that period. It's a metaphor for what was going on around me. I didn't want to paint figuratively. I didn't want something that was overtly referencing the social issues around me, but I wanted to find a way to describe them.⁸

Looking at Williams's 1979 print *Red Fern* (cat. 18), viewers can see the foundation and evolution of the artist's endeavors. In it, Williams's mark-making is rapid, energetic, and an almost dizzying display of his mastery of aquatint and etching, culminating in an organic yet precise composition that is harmonious, while also remaining enigmatic. Does "Red Fern" refer to the public housing project in New York City that his parents moved to from North Carolina? Is it a reflection of his long-held passion for jazz? Williams provides an adept analysis of what many of these artists and works from the Ollie collection are trying to accomplish:

What I try to do is be very focused on my own history, my own experience. I don't consciously try to make "ethnic art." What I'm assuming is the sum total of my experience will come to bear on my art . . . anything that hits a resonant note for other people means they have had the same cumulative experience that I have had.⁹

Whether it is through the heights of exhilarating color, the shape of an avant-garde canvas, the creation of a different kind of painterly surface, or the mystifying concoctions of media used to compose their works, these artists have all exposed a different aspect of the American art experience. They have demonstrated for black artists of this generation that there can be liberation in discarding the literal representation of the figure, the place, or the body. Despite financial, social, or spatial constraints, the emancipation of black artists from the confines of the figurative presented them with a new opportunity, just as it did for their American and European counterparts. They constructed spaces and places that provided them the freedom to explore, to create, to express the very fibers of their existence, and to gain importance in a world that was telling them they did not matter. This is why the Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection creates a legacy much greater than the virtuosity of the artists whom it represents. It is a declaration of a people who were dedicated to providing their descendants with an indelible understanding of their power as innovators, while, at the same time, validating the artistic pursuits of black artists and offering hope for future generations.

Notes

First epigraph: W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Talented Tenth," in *The Negro Problem: A Series of Articles by Representative American Negroes of Today*, ed. Booker T. Washington (New York: James Pott and Company, 1903); repr. in *The Future of the Race*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Cornel West (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 134.

- 1. The Amistad Foundation, rebranded the Amistad Center for Art & Culture between fall 2005 and spring 2006, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. It is located within the oldest continuously run public art museum in the nation, the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art in Hartford, Connecticut.
- 2. Ronald Ollie, in an interview with the author, February 25, 2019.
- 3. Sharon F. Patton, *African-American Art* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1998), 179.
- 4. Ollie, in an interview with the author, February 25, 2019.

- 5. Richard J. Powell, Black Art and Culture in the 20th Century (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1997), 136.
- 6. Powell, Black Art and Culture, 107.
- 7. Celia McGee, "Driven to Abstraction," *ARTnews*, January 1, 2011, accessed March 17, 2019, www.artnews.com/2011/01/01/driven-to-abstraction/.
- 8. "William T. Williams by Mona Hadler," Oral History Project series, BOMB Magazine, February 19, 2018, accessed March 17, 2019, https://bombmagazine.org/articles/william-t-williams-by-mona-hadler/.
- 9. Joan Oleck, "Williams, William T. 1942—," in Contemporary Black Biography, vol. 11, ed. L. Mpho Mabunda and Shirelle Phelps, 250–53 (Detroit, MI: Gale Research, Inc., 1996), accessed March 17, 2019, https://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/CX2871300071/GVRL?u=gvrl_catalog&sid=GVRL&xid=253b27b8.





Terry Adkins, American, 1953-2014

Untitled, 1979 ink and gouache with graphite 40×25 in. (101.6 \times 63.5 cm) Saint Louis Art Museum, The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection, Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 114:2017

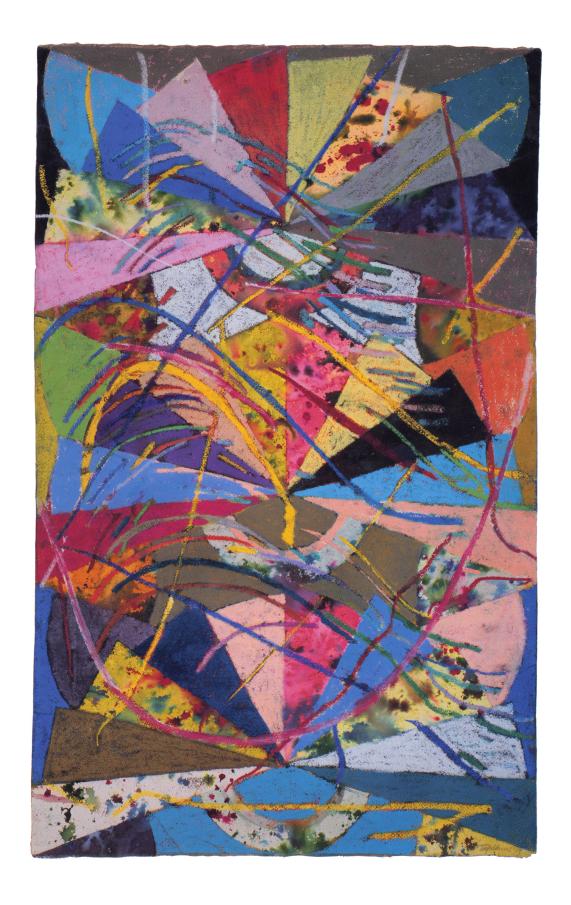
Throughout his career as a sculptor and conceptual artist, Terry Adkins combined abstraction with histories he inherited as both an African American and an artist. "I have always chosen to work abstractly," he explained, "to deal with the principles of what I feel is the rich wellspring of the culture I come from." By the 1980s, he employed discarded materials "made by other hands for other purposes and at other times."2 These materials musical instruments, industrial equipment, and architectural fragments-have their own history, and Adkins linked them with his research on prominent African American musicians, including John Coltrane, Jimi Hendrix, and Bessie Smith. Through this strategy of recovery—combining formalism, assemblage, and activist engagement—he paid tribute and "[brought] attention to things that wouldn't ordinarily see the light of day."3

Preceding his more recognized methods, Adkins made this drawing the year he completed his studies and circled back to his hometown, Washington, D.C. Here, the colorful rays and arcs recall the signature beams of light and concentric orbs in works by the Harlem Renaissance master Aaron Douglas (1899–1979), who considered his rings of color visual expressions of the sounds of slave songs. Adkins greatly admired Douglas, who, though retired from teaching at Fisk University, remained a familiar figure at the school during Adkins's years as a student there. Adkins eagerly anticipated encounters on campus with Douglas, whose acclaimed mural cycle in the school's Cravath Library had recently been restored.⁴

In the mid-2000s, Adkins published two celebratory essays on Douglas, describing him as "the source of ethereal concentric circles" with "gravitational force," and whose "love for his people continue to inspire, renew and rally us to action." Through this lens, Adkins's drawing provides early evidence of his articulations of tribute and resistance through abstraction.

-Gretchen L. Wagner

- 1. "Terry Adkins by Calvin Reid," Oral History Project series, BOMB Magazine, March 25, 2015, accessed February 24, 2019, https://bombmagazine.org/articles/terry-adkins/.
- 2. "Terry Adkins by Calvin Reid."
- 3. Ian Berry, *Terry Adkins: Recital* (Saratoga Springs, NY: The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College, 2017), 57.
- 4. Susan Earle, ed., Aaron Douglas: African American Modernist (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 107, 115-35.
- 5. Terry Adkins, "The Vigilant Torch of an Olympian Painter," *American Studies* 49, no. 1/2 (Spring/Summer 2008): 40, 43. See also Terry Adkins, "Notes on the Precious Few A.D.," *Journal of Black Studies* 35, no. 2, Special Issue: Back to the Future of Civilization: Celebrating 30 Years of African American Studies (November 2004): 224–30.



2 Robert Blackburn, American, 1920–2003

Faux Pas, 1960 lithograph published and printed by the artist $30 \times 22 \, 1/8$ in. (76.2 \times 56.2 cm) Saint Louis Art Museum, The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection, Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 121:2017

Robert Blackburn had an incalculable impact on the history of American printmaking, as an artist and a teacher, and as the founder of the Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop in New York, which became a crucible of exchange, innovation, and support.¹ Blackburn was born in Summit, New Jersey, and raised in Harlem, where he benefited from the neighborhood's collaborative and educational spirit. As a teenager he attended the Harlem Art Workshop, Augusta Savage's Uptown Art Laboratory, and the arts salon at Charles Alston's "306" studio. He studied lithography at the Harlem Community Art Center, a workshop sponsored by the Works Progress Administration (WPA); he later completed his training at the Art Students League.²

Struggling to build a career in an era when lithography was relegated to the margins of the fine art world, Blackburn recognized the need for a nurturing and inclusive environment for artists to experiment with printmaking. He opened his eponymous workshop in 1948, offering studios, classes, equipment, and guidance to artists at every level of experience, including several represented in the Ollie collection, such as Norman Lewis, Herbert Gentry, Ed Clark, and William T. Williams. Having personally experienced the decline in opportunities for emerging artists and artists of color after the WPA program ended in 1943, Blackburn ensured that his workshop's resources would be accessible to anyone, regardless of ethnic or socioeconomic background.

In support of this mission, the workshop later added fellowships for artists from underrepresented backgrounds and developing countries, and created community outreach initiatives.³

While operating the workshop, Blackburn continued to develop his own artistic vision. A year of study in Europe on a John Hay Whitney Traveling Fellowship (1953–54) accelerated his transition from figuration to abstraction. *Faux Pas* represents the artist's more gestural mode, which coincided with his tenure as master printer at Universal Limited Art Editions (1957–63). There, Blackburn helped established artists such as Robert Rauschenberg and Helen Frankenthaler incorporate lithography into their practice.

-Heather A. Hughes

^{1.} Blackburn's original workshop ran from 1948 to 2001. The Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts relaunched it posthumously in 2005. See "Mission/History," EFA Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop Program, accessed March 7, 2019, http://www.rbpmw-efanyc.org/missionhistory.

^{2.} Deborah Cullen, *Robert Blackburn: Passages*, exh. cat. (College Park: The David C. Driskell Center at the University of Maryland, 2014), 19–33.

^{3.} See Noah Jemisin, Bob Blackburn's Printmaking Workshop: Artists of Color, exh. cat. (Brookville, NY: Hillwood Art Museum, Long Island University, 1991).



3 Chakaia Booker, American, born 1953

Untitled, 2014 woodcut and lithograph with chine collé published by James E. Lewis Museum of Art Foundation, Inc., Baltimore printed by Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop, New York 28 9/16 \times 20 5/16 in. (72.5 \times 51.6 cm) Saint Louis Art Museum, The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection, Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 122:2017

Chakaia Booker began her sculptural practice in the early 1990s, when she was in her late thirties. Before starting her career in sculpture she earned a BA in sociology from Rutgers University (1976). Afterward, she worked in craft and fashion design, taking up basket weaving and ceramics.1 She later went back to school, earning her MFA from the City College of New York in 1993. Booker is primarily known for her sculptures, through which she examines economic, environmental, ecological, and racial concerns. These objects are built from discarded materials—primarily rubber tires—that she cuts, layers, and loops. For her, the tire resonates both in terms of its versatility as a material and its range of historical and cultural associations. Abandoned tires are iconic symbols of urban waste and blight, yet Booker transforms them into extraordinary artistic compositions.

Experimentation and creativity are central to Booker's life and practice. In a 2001 interview with Charlotta Kotik she explained, "There is no separation between who I am and what I do." As a fashion designer, she constructed wearable sculptures that incorporated found items, such as pieces of wood and broken dishes. Her interest in tires and rubber began in the 1980s; living in Manhattan's East Village, Booker collected shredded tires and pooled rubber from parking lots, sidewalks, and alleys surrounded by derelict buildings.

In 2009, Booker began working with the Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop. Like her sculptures, her prints combine a variety of materials to create patterns and textures, blurring the boundaries of printmaking and collage. *Untitled* incorporates lithography, woodcut, and chine collé. Using tools she found in the workshop, Booker created nineteen pieces of elaborately patterned paper printed with woodcuts. She then cut the papers and combined them to form a new composition, which in this case was produced as an edition to benefit the James E. Lewis Museum of Art.

Whether through sculpture or printmaking, Booker embraces the language of abstraction while using found materials. Through her surprising, intricate manipulation of those materials, she transforms everyday objects, complicating our relationship to things we encounter in our daily lives. In doing so, she elevates our understanding of those items as materials produced and used, then thoughtlessly discarded.

---Hannah Klemm

^{1.} See Jan Garden Castro, "The Language of Life: A Conversation with Chakaia Booker," *Sculpture Magazine* 22, no. 1 (January/February 2003): 28–33.

^{2.} Charlotta Kotik, "Chakaia Booker," in *Chakaia Booker: New Sculptures*, exh. cat. (New York: Marlborough Chelsea, 2001), 6.



4 Frank Bowling, British, born Guyana, 1936

Fishes, Wishes and Star Apple Blue, 1992
acrylic on canvas
39 1/2 × 40 in. (100.3 × 101.6 cm)
Saint Louis Art Museum, The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection,
Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 187:2017

Fishes, Wishes and Star Apple Blue evokes a sense of childlike wonder. By referencing the color of the star apple, a fruit native to the Caribbean region, Frank Bowling recalls his childhood in Guyana. "The titles I like to feel are a private joke, evocative," he explains. "You'd have to be in the know to know the connection between the activity of painting and the literary connections that stretch across the cultural divide. An awful lot is personal and in riddles." The titles of Bowling's works hold clues to what the viewer sees on the canvas.

Bowling approached his canvases in this period informed by the masters of English landscape painting, such as Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788). He was also influenced by his contemporaries in abstraction, whom he met in New York in the late 1960s. Using a spatula and a palette knife, he works the surfaces of his paintings with clear acrylic gel, often mixing pearlescent and metallic pigments into the paint. The gel allows the colors that have seeped into the canvas to shine through the surface. Bowling said of the light in his work, "When I went home [to Guyana] in 1989, I was staggered. When I looked at the landscape . . . I understood the light in my pictures was a very different light. I saw a crystalline haze, maybe an east wind and water rising up into the sky. It occurred to me for the first time, in my fifties, that the light is about Guyana. It is constant in my efforts."2 The light that shines through the center of this image is framed by the hand-stitched and painted edges of the canvas.

Bowling's artistic career began at the Royal College of Art in London, where he created figurative works. His cohorts included David Hockney and other artists working in British pop. In 1967, when Bowling moved to New York, many of the titles of his work referenced his childhood home and the newly independent Guyana.³ Bowling's work from the 1970s on marked a shift in his career toward pure abstraction and experimentation, qualities that are evident in *Fishes, Wishes and Star Apple Blue*.

-Alexis Assam

- 1. Corrine L. Jennings and Sur Rodney, A/cross currents: Synthesis in African American Abstract Painting, exh. cat. (New York: Kenkeleba House, Inc., 1992), 4.
- 2. Mel Gooding, *Frank Bowling* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2011), 111.
- 3. Leon Wainwright, "Frank Bowling and the Appetite for British Pop," Third Text 22, no. 2 (March 2008): 203.



5 Nanette Carter, American, born 1954

Slightly Off Keel #60, 1999
oil on Mylar
35 7/8 × 36 1/16 in. (91.1 × 91.6 cm)
Saint Louis Art Museum, The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection,
Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 124:2017

Nanette Carter responded to an unsettled mood as the year 2000 approached. "With the new millennium upon us," she observed, "anxiety over our preparedness and questions around our humanity, or lack thereof, has set in. Civil wars, biased crimes, rape, and the Y2K computer dilemma plague our societies."1 It was a moment of heightened concern about a rapidly advancing and uncertain future, and this agitation prompted Carter's expansive series Slightly Off Keel, comprising more than one hundred painted, drawn, and printed works. Moving away from canvas in the late 1990s, Carter, inspired by architectural drawings, had recently adopted Mylar, a thin polyester film, as her support of choice. She admired it for its atmospheric translucency and its potential for being worked on both sides. The material is frosted on its surface, supplying a satisfying "tooth" to hold the oil medium.2 Slightly Off Keel #60—a title referring to a sailboat's delicate balance as it speeds through water—demonstrates multiple mark-making types, both structured and loose, to convey an equilibrium of stability and motion.

Carter insists that abstract art should not revert to pure formalism but instead remain attuned to the unresolved realities of current events and one's environmental surroundings. In part, she links her compositions, which she calls "scapes," to nature's volatility, referencing the artist Joan Mitchell (1925–1992) as a formative figure. Mitchell's turn to landscape subjects for her animated abstractions moved Carter,

who acknowledges, "the drama of nature has been the catalyst" for her own creative output of the past four decades.³ She combines this interest with her attention to Russian constructivism, where the sober organization of materials and composition is precisely articulated, while remaining tethered to the realities of social and political circumstances. In this manner, her invented abstract "scapes"—at once composed and chaotic—connect to her lived circumstances. For Carter, "abstract artists are always relating what they do and what they see to what's around them."⁴

-Gretchen L. Wagner

- 1. Sande Webster Gallery, Philadelphia, "Slightly Off Keel," exh. promo, 1999.
- 2. Nanette Carter, in a conversation with the author, February 2019.
- 3. Nanette Carter, "On Using Scapes," *Black Renaissance Noire* 9, no. 2–3 (Fall 2009/Winter 2010): 89.
- 4. Evette Porter, "Nanette Carter: Pastel Perfect," Essence 21, no. 1 (May 1990): 84.



6 Ed Clark, American, born 1926

Untitled, 1969 acrylic and dry pigment 22 $1/8 \times 27$ 1/2 in. (56.2 \times 69.9 cm) Saint Louis Art Museum, The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection, Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 126:2017

Ed Clark is credited with helping to reconceptualize American abstraction. Having served in the US Army Air Corps during World War II, he enrolled at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1946 with tuition help from the G.I. Bill. Learning about the impressionists and cubists there made him want to engage directly with them. He could do so in Paris, and in 1952 he enrolled at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière, joining other Americans enticed by the creative and intellectual ferment of the times. Besides the quality of light in France, Clark was inspired by the work of painter Nicolas de Staël (1914–1955) who, in addition to Willem de Kooning and Paul Cézanne, was a chief influence on his work. De Staël's thickly applied passages, which Clark considered "not quite as frantic as American strokes," kindled his appreciation for the plasticity of paint.1

By 1963 Clark began to experiment with manipulating paint with a push broom. Placing the canvas on the floor, he poured pools of acrylic on the surface and then shoved the broom through them, often traversing the entire composition in a swift, continuous stroke to create bands of interfused color. This maneuver offered Clark the speed he desired in his process and images. It determined a physical and spatial pace connected to "modern times," as he once described it, and reflected the breakthroughs of accelerated movement occurring around him.² Considered among the first American artists to experiment with shaped canvases, Clark decided to fashion circular and oval supports in 1968, some of massive scale, reaching nearly twenty feet across.

By truncating the sweeping horizontals with bracketing arcs, the ellipse accentuates motion by bringing it full stop at the terminating edge. Throughout his work, the interplay of color is paramount and, perhaps, most overtly visible as nuanced transitions within the bands of paint.³ Clark often credits his environment as being the catalyst for new chromatic explorations. Since 1971 he has completed multiple series reflecting his working trips abroad, to Greece, Nigeria, Mexico, Martinique, Brazil, China, and elsewhere.

-Gretchen L. Wagner

- 1. Barbara Cavaliere and George R. N'Namdi, eds., Edward Clark: For the Sake of the Search (Belleville Lake, MI: Belleville Lake Press, 1997), 21.
- 2. "Edward Clark by Jack Whitten," Oral History Project series, BOMB Magazine, June 2, 2014, accessed February 28, 2019, https://bombmagazine.org/articles/edward-clark/.
- 3. For a discussion of color's function in Clark's paintings, see Darby English, 1971: A Year in the Life of Color (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 53–74.



7 Alonzo Davis, American, born 1942

Rock Steady, 1992 collage of cut and woven paper with paint 30 $1/4 \times 22 \ 1/8$ in. (76.8 \times 56.2 cm) Saint Louis Art Museum, The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection, Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 134:2017

Alonzo Davis made his mark on the art scene with work that reflected motifs from cultures around the world, including the American Southwest, the Caribbean, and Africa. When he was dean of the San Antonio Art Institute (1991–92), he created *Rock Steady* as part of a series of woven paintings he referred to as his "blanket series." He constructed *Rock Steady* by interweaving paper strips into geometric squares. He framed the image with a border in shades of red and worked the surface with layers of acrylic paint, revealing the influence of multiple modes of abstraction. Texture and pattern are central to his practice, and many of his works from this period were drawn from Native American motifs.

As a teenager, Alonzo Davis moved with his family from his childhood home in Tuskegee, Alabama, to Los Angeles. There he earned an MFA in printmaking and design at Otis Art Institute, where Charles White was one of his professors. After graduation, Davis and his brother Dale Brockman Davis were curious about contemporary African American artists. With recommendations from White they set off on a road trip across the United States in the summer of 1966. Along the way they met many black artists, including James A. Porter, Edward Love, Romare Bearden, Norman Lewis, Hale Woodruff, and Merton Simpson.² Though the trip was prompted by their quest for knowledge, it inspired their careers as artists and gallerists.

Bearden and Woodruff led the Spiral group in Harlem, and meeting them encouraged the Davis brothers to open the Brockman Gallery in Los Angeles. In 1967 the gallery was dedicated to showing art by established and emerging minority artists, especially African Americans.³ By establishing this space during the height of the Black Power and black art movements, they increased visibility of the work of African American artists in this period.

-Alexis Assam

- 1. Alonzo Davis, The Bamboo Muse: Art, Prose, Poetry, ed. Kay S. Lindsey (San Francisco: Blurb, 2010), 29.
- 2. Andrea Gyorody, "Alonzo Davis," in *Now Dig This! Art and Black Los Angeles*, 1960–1980, Digital Archive (Los Angeles: Hammer Museum, 2016), accessed February 26, 2019, https://hammer.ucla.edu/now-dig-this/artists/alonzo-davis/.
- 3. Kellie Jones, *Now Dig This! Art and Black Los Angeles*, 1960–1980, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Hammer Museum, 2011), 258.



8 Herbert Gentry, American, 1919–2003

Our Web, 1990 watercolor and gouache 29 $1/2 \times 22 \, 1/4$ in. (74.9 \times 56.5 cm) Saint Louis Art Museum, The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection, Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 151:2017

After his first exposure to the city of Paris while serving in the army during World War II, Herbert Gentry returned in 1946, to study in its notable art academies and private ateliers. While in Paris, Gentry began what would come to be a lifetime living and making art among an international community. Between 1946 and his death in 2003, Gentry maintained—often simultaneously homes and studios in five European cities, as well as New York, frequently traveling between locales. He reveled in the relationships he developed, embracing the interactions that the European café culture helped foster. His nightclub and exhibition space, Chez Honey, which he ran for three years in Montparnasse, placed him at the hub of midcentury creativity.1 Many Europeans and Americans—among them the musicians Duke Ellington, Zoot Sims, and Lena Horne; artist Larry Rivers; and author Richard Wright—would frequent Gentry's establishment to perform and experience improvisatory modern jazz.

Gentry's network of friends and associates are evoked in his work where clusters of contoured heads and bodies emerge, interconnected, among a dense web of interwoven lines.² A devoted abstractionist, Gentry retained the figure as a conduit "to see form."³ His methods reflect a crosscurrent of stylistic tendencies, having studied with the cubist painter Georges Braque, and knowing Beauford Delaney—whose attention to color and light broke new ground. Gentry's dreamlike fantasy worlds, populated by totems and masklike visages, have been

linked to his association with the CoBrA group, whose members he befriended in Paris and Scandinavia.⁴ Above all, Gentry insisted that his approach to his images, which he allowed to unfold freely without plan, relied on "a certain spontaneity," where his "subconscious plays a great role."⁵

-Gretchen L. Wagner

- 1. Serge Guilbaut, Lost, Loose and Loved: Foreign Artists in Paris 1944-1968, exh. cat. (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2018), 94.
- 2. Rachel Tolano, Making Connections: The Art and Life of Herbert Gentry, exh. cat. (Boston: Boston University Art Gallery, 2014), 16–25.
- 3. G. R. N'Namdi Gallery, Herbert Gentry: The Man, the Master, the Magic, exh. cat. (Chicago: G. R. N'Namdi Gallery, 2008), 19.
- 4. Catherine Bernard, Michel Fabre, Valerie J. Mercer, and Peter Selz, Explorations in the City of Light: African-American Artists in Paris, 1945–1965, exh. cat. (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 1996), 54–55.
- 5. "Oral History Interview with Herbert Gentry, 1991 May 23," conducted by Liza Kirwin for the Archives of American Art, accessed February 20, 2019, https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-herbert-gentry-11493.



9 Sam Gilliam, American, born 1933

Half Circle Red, 1975 acrylic on canvas $78 \times 33 \times 6$ in. (198.1 \times 83.8 \times 15.2 cm) Saint Louis Art Museum, The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection, Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 189:2017a,b

According to renowned curator Walter Hopps, who exhibited Sam Gilliam's pioneering draped canvases at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., in 1969, Gilliam possessed "the courage to proceed as though his guide were 'more is more,'" populating his paintings, watercolors, and prints with a "superabundant array of visual elements." Indeed, Gilliam's Half Circle Red is replete with information for the eye. Gilliam formulated this visual profusion in the second half of the 1960s, when he began to soak or pour acrylic paint onto raw canvas. He folded, crumpled, and tied the canvas, unfurling it when dry to discover the unpredictable results. He mounted some of these canvases on beveled stretchers, but for others, including Half Circle Red, he jettisoned the stretcher altogether and suspended the relaxed, undulate work from the wall or ceilinga method earning him international critical attention.

Having maintained a studio in Washington, D.C., since 1962, Gilliam associated with the Washington Color School artists, and as a result, his vibrant, stained images are often evaluated in relation to this group. Other relationships are also evident, especially connections to experiments with sculpture and performance. Gilliam emphasizes the intrinsic physical properties of his materials—how acrylic pools and cotton duck sags, for example—and, in doing so, he links to process art and postminimal tendencies.² In the studio, Gilliam repeatedly walked around his canvases, dropping paint along the way. It is a repetitive perambulation that he equates with drill team exercises he participated in as

a soldier.³ It also recalls Bruce Nauman's studio pacing, which helped define performance art during the period. Gilliam was well aware of this emerging form, especially through Alice Denney's legendary "NOW Festival," presented in Washington, D.C., in 1966.⁴ Notably, Gilliam's works bridge the formal abstraction of a previous generation with the cross-disciplinary practices that followed.

-Gretchen L. Wagner

- 1. J. B. Speed Art Museum, Sam Gilliam: Paintings and Works on Paper, exh. cat. (Louisville, KY: Speed Art Museum, 1976), unpaginated.
- 2. Jonathan P. Binstock, Sam Gilliam: A Retrospective, exh. cat. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 33–34; see also Johnathan P. Binstock and Josef Helfenstein, eds., The Music of Color. Sam Gilliam 1967–1973, exh. cat. (Basel: Kunstmuseum Basel, 2018), 47.
- 3. "A Conversation with Artist Sam Gilliam," with Paul R. Davis, October 30, 2015, The Menil Collection, Houston, accessed March 5, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kmu4QXECiog.
- 4. David Kordansky Gallery, *Sam Gilliam*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: David Kordansky Gallery, 2017), 84.



10 Bill Hutson, American, born 1936

Ebco Na, 1990–91 offset lithograph with acrylic printed by Brandywine Workshop, Philadelphia 29 $7/8 \times 21$ 7/16 in. (75.9 \times 54.5 cm) Saint Louis Art Museum, The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection, Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 160:2017

Bill Hutson's style and method place him among a generation of intrepid twentieth-century post-painterly abstractionists who radically reconsidered the process of painting. While living in San Francisco during the 1960s, where he encountered Richard Diebenkorn and David Park, Hutson began to shift from figurative imagery to abstraction. He then furthered his explorations in Europe, where fellow expatriates such as Ed Clark and Sam Middleton provided a responsive community. He rejected drawing from life models and instead focused on the physical manipulations of paint and its support to achieve pictorial results. As he explained, "There's no model. The model is the material, you know?"1 Indeed, he experimented with numerous materials and techniques, having adopted acrylic paint as his primary medium in 1965. Hutson was attracted to its versatility and quick drying time. When working on paper, as he often does, he presses crumpled canvas, branches, paper clips, and lids, for example, onto the surface, pours paint over it, and then removes the objects to reveal a residual image.² He also couples his collage-and-stain method with hand-brushed marks—usually thick, linear accretions of finely blended color, using tape to define the hard edges.3

The genesis of *Ebco Na*, which Hutson refers to as a "painted print," stems from the encouragement of peers. One influencer was Al Loving (see cat. 13), who had collaborated with the Brandywine Workshop,

founded in 1972 to expand printmaking opportunities for artists of color. In 1990, Hutson followed his friend's recommendation to work with the printshop, having already produced prints with Stanley William Hayter and Georges Visat in Paris and Robert Blackburn in New York. At Brandywine, he pulled impressions from an offset lithography press manufactured by the Electric Boat Company (EBCO), which inspired the title *Ebco Na.*⁴ Inclined to revise his compositions, Hutson returned to his studio with a stack of *Ebco Na* impressions and applied acrylic paint to develop new pieces. Within these designs, floating spirals and arcs exist both printed and painted—one translucent, the other opaque. Overlaid and juxtaposed, they evoke the animated spatial play essential to Hutson's pictorial invention as a whole.

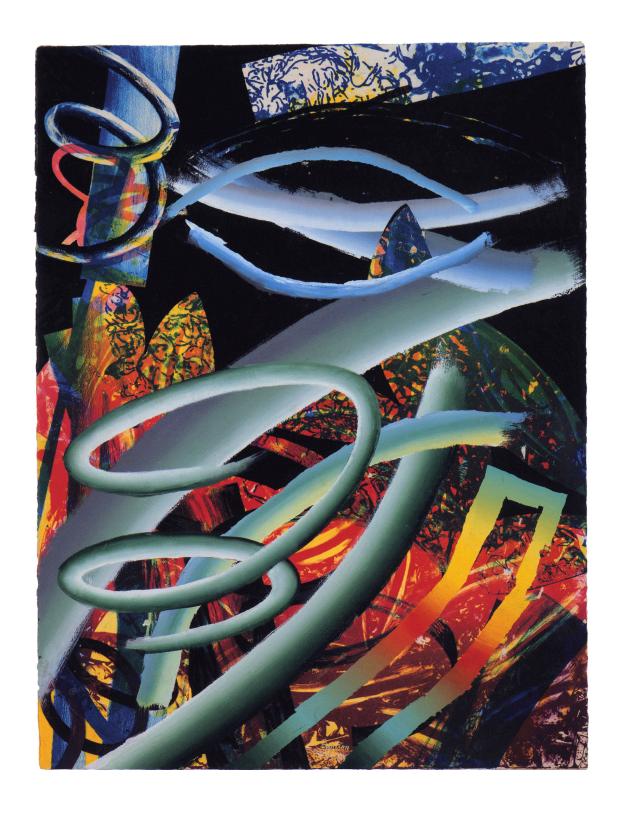
-Gretchen L. Wagner

^{1.} Tamara Goeglein, (trans) formations: Studies in Form and Composition by Bill Hutson, exh. cat. (Lancaster, PA: Phillips Museum of Art, 2015), 14.

^{2.} Bill Hutson, in a conversation with the author, February 26, 2019.

^{3.} Kellie Jones, *Bill Hutson: Paintings, 1978–1987*, exh. cat. (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 1987), 7–8.

^{4.} Hutson, in a conversation with the author, February 26, 2019.



Norman Lewis, American, 1909-1979

Untitled, 1966 oil 18×24 in. (45.7 \times 61 cm) Saint Louis Art Museum, The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection, Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 167:2017

Norman Lewis came of age in the midst of the Harlem Renaissance, and began his career painting in a social realist mode. By the mid-1940s, working alongside abstract expressionists Jackson Pollock and Ad Reinhardt, Lewis shifted to abstraction, although he continued to reference human figures, architecture, nature, and music—especially jazz.¹

Though considered a loner, Lewis was deeply involved in the New York art scene and influenced many younger black artists, including Jack Whitten (see cat. 17).² Lewis was also an outspoken activist for sociopolitical change and a founding member of Spiral, a diverse collective of black artists that formed in response to the March on Washington in 1963. This short-lived group grappled with ideas concerning the relationship between art and civil rights.³ Lewis, like many abstract artists, favored separating art and politics, stating that the artist "must communicate unique experiences so that they become unquestionably possible for the viewer."⁴

Lewis worked in a variety of media, and his works in the Ollie collection illustrate his remarkable range of styles: from early experimental drawings (checklist 54 and 55), to a late print produced at Robert Blackburn's Printmaking Workshop (checklist 57), to this atmospheric color field painting on paper. Painted works like *Untitled* allowed Lewis to explore the expressive potential of the color

black, while highlighting the interplay between dark and light tonalities.⁶ They anticipate works like Ed Clark's Bahia series, also represented in the Ollie collection (checklist 17 and 18).

—Abigail Yoder

- 1. See Ruth Fine, ed., *Procession: The Art of Norman Lewis*, exh. cat. (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 2015); and Ann Gibson, "Recasting the Canon: Norman Lewis and Jackson Pollock," *Artforum* 30, no. 7 (March 1992): 66–67.
- 2. Ruth Fine, "The Spiritual in the Material," in *Procession*, 19–103; For Lewis's influence on Whitten, see Norman L. Kleeblatt and Lucy H. Partman, "The Edge of Abstraction: Norman Lewis and the Joyner / Giuffrida Collection," in *Four Generations: The Joyner / Giuffrida Collection of Abstract Art*, ed. Courtney J. Martin (New York: Gregory R. Miller & Co., 2016), 25.
- 3. Jeanne Siegel, "Why Spiral?" ARTnews 65, no. 5 (September 1966): 48.
- 4. Fine, "The Spiritual in the Material," in *Procession*, 74, 98. As Fine points out, this separation was not always possible.
- 5. See Fine, Procession, 50, 64, 129.
- 6. See Ann Eden Gibson, "Black is a Color: Norman Lewis and Modernism in New York," in Ann Eden Gibson and Jorge Daniel Veneciano, Norman Lewis: Black Paintings 1946–1977, exh. cat. (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 1998), 11; and David Anfam, "The Music of Invisibility," in Norman Lewis: Pulse, exh. cat. (New York: Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, 2009), 11.



12 James Little, American, born 1952

Double Exposure, 2008 oil and wax on canvas 39×50 in. (99.1 \times 127 cm) Saint Louis Art Museum, The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection, Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 190:2017

James Little's painting is guided by an intuitive sense of form and color. As in *Double Exposure*, his work often consists of triangular vectors of vibrant color that move up and down the canvas in a strict geometry. Coming from a family that valued and supported creativity, Little became interested in art at a young age. He was born and raised in Memphis, Tennessee, then very much a segregated city, and attended college at the Memphis Academy of Arts (now Memphis College of Art), where he studied painting. Little's early work showed promise, and he was accepted into Syracuse University, where he earned an MFA in 1976.

At Syracuse, modernist art critic Clement Greenberg was one of Little's professors. Greenberg's ideas about flatness and abstraction strongly shaped Little's painting practice. As Little explained in 2011, "I'm a strong believer in modernism in painting—something physical and perceptually tangible I'm not interested in illusionism, the way a lot of abstract artists are. I'm interested in flatness, the flat plane, and materials that keep illusions at bay."

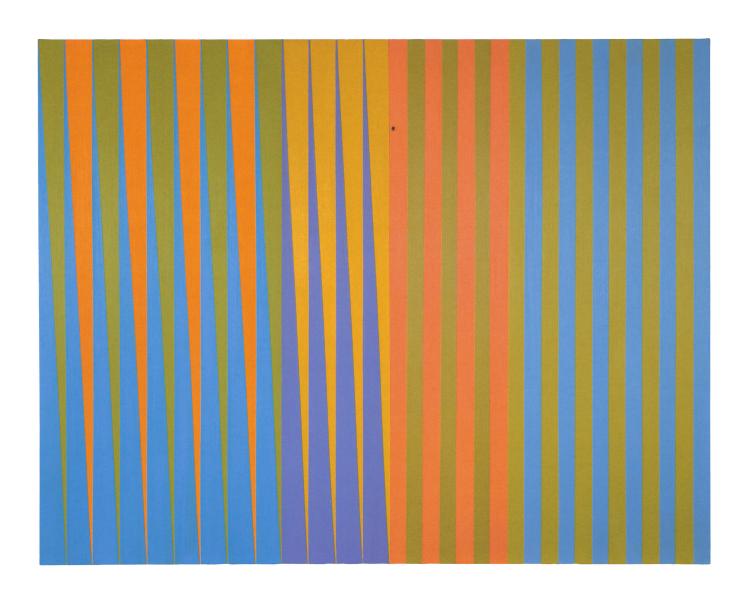
Never satisfied with manufactured art materials, Little has long maintained an alchemist's approach to art making. His decision to mix his own paints was informed by his experience mixing materials like cement and mortar as a young man while assisting his father, a construction worker.² Little begins his paintings by applying several

coats of stand oil to a canvas. The oil prevents the canvas from burning when he applies hot beeswax, the basis for his encaustic paintings. He then takes a palette knife and pulls the paint and wax upward, layer by layer. This process gives his works a unique luminosity.

Little also creates works on paper, among them Study for the Surrogate, 2002 (fig. 7 and checklist 58). To make this work he applied fluid, vibrant areas of watercolor, punctuated by radiating vertical vectors that mirror the geometry of some of his paintings. Both his drawings and paintings remain fully nonrepresentational, affirming the artist's belief that abstraction and its formal elements, such as color and line, have the power to make people see the world differently.

^{1.} Celia McGee, "Driven to Abstraction," ARTnews 110, no. 1 (January 2011): 78–80.

^{2. &}quot;James Little by LeRonn P. Brooks," Oral History Project series, BOMB Magazine (April 19, 2017), accessed March 19, 2019, http://bombmagazine.org/articles/james-little/.



13 Al Loving, American, 1935-2005

Zayamaca #4, 1993

collage of cut painted paper mounted on Plexiglas

irregular: $50.1/2 \times 20.1/2 \times 1/4$ in. $(128.3 \times 52.1 \times 0.6 \text{ cm})$

Saint Louis Art Museum, The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection,

Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 172:2017

From the beginning of his career, Detroit-born artist Al Loving worked in an abstract style. Loving earned his MFA degree from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and moved to New York City in 1968 to pursue a career in art. He received immediate recognition in 1969 when he became the first African American to have a solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art. His early works were wall installations built on strict systems of geometric modules, primarily hexagons and cubes, which he believed embodied the tension between flatness and spatial illusion. He configured these modules so that they could be rearranged depending on the installation.

Eventually, Loving became disenchanted with making hard-edge geometric paintings and decided to expand beyond the proverbial "cube." Inspired by an exhibition at the Whitney Museum, Abstract Design in American Quilts (1971), he began to tear apart painted canvases and recombine the pieces. He sewed the strips of canvas together, creating large fabric constructions. Later, he turned his attention to three-dimensional space and sculptural forms made of cardboard and torn paper. He referred to these constructions as "material abstractions" because they were not flat enough to be collages and not sculptural enough to be three-dimensional assemblages.²

In the 1980s, Loving further expanded his multifaceted practice to encompass a new improvisatory approach he called "format composing." He began to produce multimedia works in spirals that wind and weave in

every direction and seem to defy gravity. Loving saw the spiral as a symbol of regeneration and life. The stiff, sculptural spirals of *Zayamaca #4* are made of paper coated with thick acrylic paint. The spirals move vertically up the wall, forming spatial extensions that rely on the physicality of the layers of materials. Throughout his career, Loving found many different and unique ways to dispense with traditional notions of composition, the relationship between figure and ground, and the pictorial frame, to create vibrant, materially rich abstract works.

- 1. Alvin Loving: Paintings, exh. broch., New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, December 19, 1969—January 25, 1970.
- April Kingsley, "Alvin Loving: On a Spiraling Trajectory," in Al Loving: Color Constructs, exh. cat. (Purchase, NY: Neuberger Museum of Art, 1998), 7.
- 3. Albright-Knox Art Gallery, The Appropriate Object: Maren Hassinger, Richard Hunt, Oliver Jackson, Alvin Loving, Betye Saar, Raymond Saunders, John Scott, exh. cat. (Buffalo, NY: Albright-Knox Art Gallery, 1989), 43.



14 Evangeline Montgomery, American, born 1933

Sunset, 1997 offset lithograph and screenprint published and printed by Brandywine Workshop, Philadelphia 21 $5/8 \times 29$ 13/16 in. (54.9 \times 75.7 cm) Saint Louis Art Museum, The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection, Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 176:2017

The central theme of Evangeline Montgomery's work is memory. Her travel diaries and photographs are the basis for transforming her memories into paintings and prints. As Montgomery explained, "These color field works are tactile engagements of memories, of place, as well as abstractions of life experiences and cultural connections." She uses calligraphic marks and notations to create visual representations of her experiences and her awe of nature.

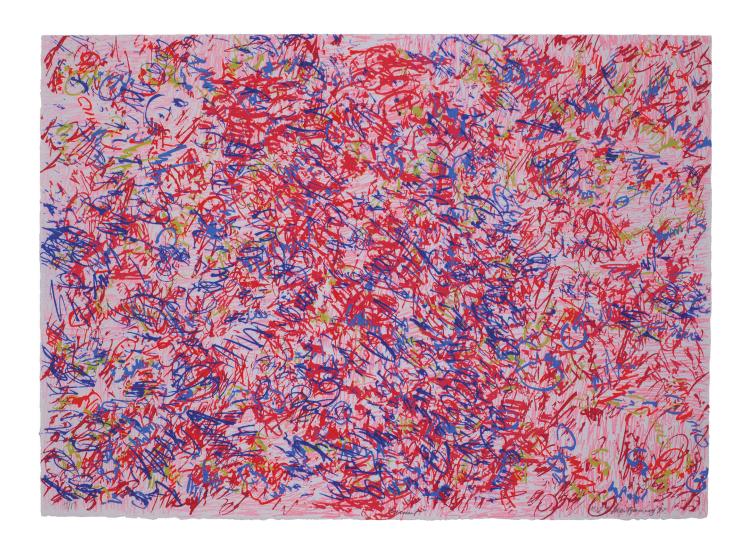
Early in her career, in creating multimedia works, she incorporated found objects and fiber materials onto metal boxes. From 1962 to 1965 she lived in Nigeria and traveled throughout West Africa. This experience informed her richly textured "ancestral" box series of the 1970s, which reflected a spiritual quality.³ The calligraphic markings present throughout her work evoke the abstract expressionist lines of artists such as Cy Twombly and Joan Mitchell, but she also credits the Amharic script of Ethiopia and Uli designs made by the Igbo women in Nigeria.⁴

Her lithograph *Sunset* evokes the flames engulfing redwood trees in the California wildfires, a memory of her time living in Los Angeles from 1955 to 1976.⁵ In this print, calligraphic markings cascade with shades of red, pink, and blue against a background of light pink markings. Each stroke is distinct and deliberate, with hues of bright orange and dark reds. Montgomery's creative process starts with her photographs of the textures of trees, stray marks on the sidewalk, and

floral scenes, all of which inspire her future works.⁶ In the printshop she does not create sketches but rather works directly on the printing surface, using her photographs as references. Her lifelong career in the arts—as artist, mentor, advocate, administrator, and activist—has earned her an important place within the field of African American art.

-Alexis Assam

- 1. A. M. Weaver, Memories Revealed: Current Works by E. J. Montgomery, exh. cat. (Baltimore, MD: James E. Lewis Museum of Art, Morgan State University, 2010), 5.
- 2. "Evangeline 'EJ' Montgomery on 'Sea Grass,' 1998, and 'Sunset,' 1997," video uploaded by National Museum of Women in the Arts, October 11, 2017, accessed January 15, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ttslrNQVnS4&feature=youtu.be.
- 3. Weaver, Memories Revealed, 8.
- 4. Weaver, Memories Revealed, 5.
- 5. "Evangeline 'EJ' Montgomery."
- 6. "Evangeline J. Montgomery, ART CART Oral Histories," audio recording, interview by Adjoa J. Burrowes, published by Columbia University Research Center for Arts and Culture, November 30, 2016, accessed February 3, 2019, https://doi.org/10.7916/D8PG1S6N.



15 Mary Lovelace O'Neal, American, born 1942

City Lights (Prophet with No Tongue), 1988 offset lithograph and screenprint published and printed by Brandywine Workshop, Philadelphia irregular: 28 1/8 \times 32 1/8 in. (71.4 \times 81.6 cm) Saint Louis Art Museum, The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection, Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 177:2017

Painter and printmaker Mary Lovelace O'Neal is known for bold, gestural abstractions created using unconventional materials and techniques. Born in Jackson, Mississippi, O'Neal earned her BFA degree from Howard University in 1965 and her MFA from Columbia University in 1969. At Howard, she became deeply involved in civil rights activism, joining the student-led Nonviolent Action Group. By the 1970s, O'Neal had begun experimenting with unique artistic processes, including rubbing unstretched canvases with powdered lampblack and charcoal, then punctuating these almost monochromatic works with thin lines of white or primary colors.' After graduating from Columbia, O'Neal taught at several universities across California. She taught full-time at the University of California, Berkeley for twenty years before she was named chair of the Department of Art Practice in 1999.

In 1984 Robert Blackburn (see cat. 2) invited O'Neal to work at his Printmaking Workshop in New York. There he showed O'Neal how to make monotypes, a technique that allowed her to freely manipulate printing ink on the plate as though it were paint.² Since the late 1980s, O'Neal has worked primarily in expressive, gestural abstraction with suggestions of human and animal figures and titles that refer cryptically to her personal life or the challenges she faces as a black female artist. In 1989 O'Neal traveled to Morocco, Egypt, and Chile on a research grant. In Chile she met Nemesio Antúnez,

director of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Santiago, who invited her to work at Taller 99, a printmaking workshop modeled on Stanley William Hayter's Atelier 17 in Paris and New York.

An example of O'Neal's achievement in printmaking, City Lights (Prophet with No Tongue) was created at the Brandywine Workshop in Philadelphia. This editioned collage is made of paper strips covered in an allover design resembling hand-painted marks. The papers were printed by offset lithography with inks that approximate O'Neal's high-contrast painting palette. Though the style of her paintings influenced her prints, as in this work, the reverse is also true. Starting in 1989 she made several paintings using an ink roller to apply the paint.

-Molly Moog

^{1.} Melanie Anne Herzog, "Mary Lovelace O'Neal: Painting Outside the Borders," in *Mary Lovelace O'Neal*, ed. René Paul Barilleaux, exh. cat. (Jackson: Mississippi Museum of Art, 2002), 35.

^{2.} Lizzetta LeFalle-Collins, "When the Muse Comes a-Callin': In the Print Lab with Mary Lovelace O'Neal," *Black Renaissance Noire* 13, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2013): 47.



16 Stanley Whitney, American, born 1946

Out into the Open, 2000 acrylic on canvas $53\ 1/2 \times 60$ in. (135.9 \times 152.4 cm) Saint Louis Art Museum, The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection, Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 193:2017

Since the 1970s, Stanley Whitney has explored the formal possibilities of color. For Whitney, color is not decorative; it is the subject matter of his works. As he explains it, "my primary concern is color Color with a real sense of freedom, a sense of drawing." His paintings have come to adhere to a general formula: three to five horizontal bands divide grids of multihued blocks of color, each with its own shape and proportion.

Whitney left his hometown of Philadelphia at age 18 to pursue painting. He attended the Kansas City Art Institute, graduating with a BFA degree in 1968 and moving to Brooklyn. The following summer, he participated in an art program at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, New York, where he studied with Philip Guston. Under Guston's guidance, Whitney began to experiment with abstraction, although Guston himself was moving toward figuration. A few years later, Whitney attended Yale University, where he earned his MFA degree in 1972.

Whitney claims that his mature style was solidified after a 1992 trip to Italy and Egypt, when he experienced ancient architecture, such as the Colosseum in Rome and the pyramids in Egypt. He was particularly impressed by the stacked blocks used to build these monumental structures. Influenced by this technique, he decided to stack colors in his paintings, as with *Out into the Open.*² This stacked arrangement is also present in his drawings,

which are often limited to black and white, as in *Untitled* (checklist 73). He explains that he regards drawings as skeletons for his paintings because they allow him to work out spatial and compositional arrangements.

For Whitney, jazz is another constant influence: "Painting is like music, when I first saw Cézanne, I thought, this is like Charlie Parker, only painting." His paintings embody jazz rhythms—a careful balance of spontaneity and control with color and composition providing the beat. His use of a grid as structuring device also relates to the balance between planning and improvisation in jazz. Whitney explains, "I like the contradiction of being so formal and so free at the same time."

- 1. Geoffrey Jacques, "Complicated Simplicity: The Work of Stanley Whitney," Nka: Journal of Contemporary African American Art 4, no. 4 (Spring 1996): 11.
- 2. Alex Bacon, "Call and Response," in Stanley Whitney: Radical Times, exh. cat. (London: Lisson Gallery, 2016), 17.
- 3. "Stanley Whitney by David Reed," *BOMB Magazine*, no. 123 (Spring 2013): 46.
- 4. Jacques, "Complicated Simplicity," 11.



17 Jack Whitten, American, 1939-2018

Self-Portrait, 1993

collage of cut painted paper

irregular: 29 $7/8 \times 23$ in. (75.9 × 58.4 cm)

Saint Louis Art Museum, The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection,

Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 181:2017

A remarkably innovative artist, Jack Whitten explored the boundaries of painting, pushing the medium toward collage and sculpture. In 1994 Whitten asserted, "I have changed the verb 'to paint': I don't paint a painting, I make a painting." Born in Alabama, he attended Tuskegee Institute, Alabama; Southern University, Louisiana; and the Cooper Union, New York, where he graduated with a BFA.

Whitten painted experimentally within a self-established set of conventions. His techniques included spreading paint with a twelve-foot-wide tool he called a "developer," scratching through layers of paint with a squeegee, and drying acrylic paint into thin skins. Starting in 1990, Whitten dried acrylic paint into tiles he termed tesserae, which he then pressed into wet paint on the canvas to form abstractions. This technique was informed by Byzantine mosaics he had seen in Greece, where he lived for part of each year.²

Whitten's collage *Self-Portrait* is a variation on his tesserae technique. He made the work by splashing black watercolor paint onto a sheet of white paper, cutting the paper into squares, and reassembling the squares into a new composition. In the final work, a central concentration of dark squares suggests the incipient image of a face suspended in the process of formation. The title *Self-Portrait* reinforces the idea that the painting depicts the artist himself, whether literally or symbolically.

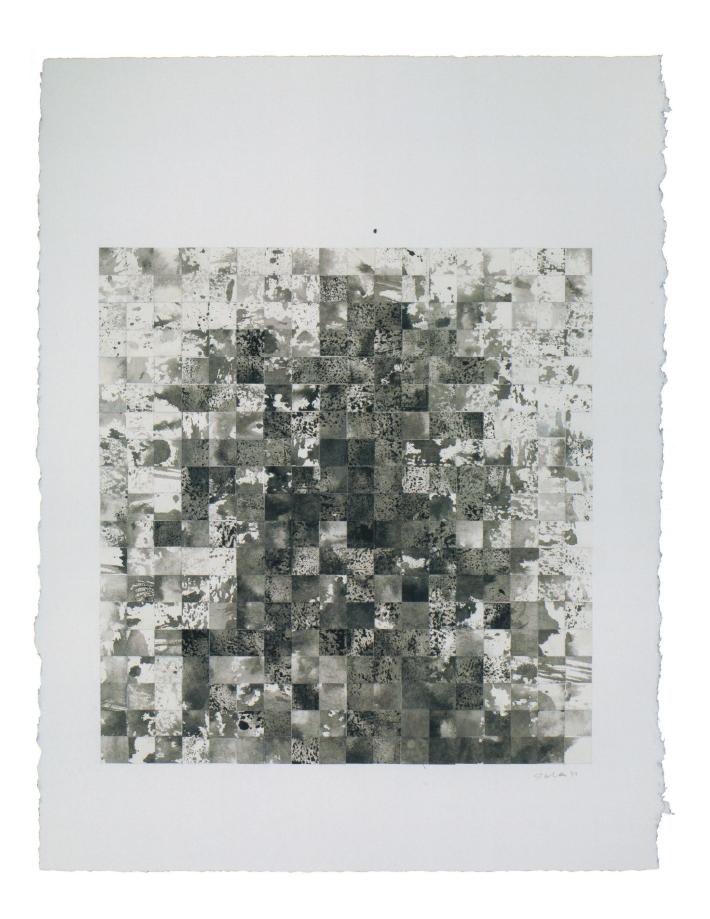
Self-Portrait is related to two tesserae paintings Whitten made in 1992—Fifth Gestalt (The Coal Miner) and Sixth Gestalt (The Seamstress). These are abstract portraits of Whitten's father, a coal miner who died when the artist was a child, and his mother, a seamstress.³ The compositions of these works mirror that of Self-Portrait in reverse, with a core of white resembling a head enveloped by inky darkness. In the titles, the word "gestalt," an organized whole that differs from the sum of its parts, refers to the transformation of the tiles into an overall image that has meaning beyond its abstract pattern. While the blurry outlines of faces in Fifth Gestalt and Sixth Gestalt may reference the loss of Whitten's parents, the emerging face in Self-Portrait suggests the artist's continual formation of self-identity.

-Molly Moog

^{1. &}quot;Jack Whitten by Kenneth Goldsmith," BOMB Magazine 48 (Summer 1994): 40.

^{2.} Rebecca Dimling Cochran, "Today's Masters: The Maker," Art & Antiques 32, no. 7 (Summer 2009): 68.

^{3.} Jack Whitten: Memorial Paintings, ed. Stuart Horodner and Stacie Lindner, exh. cat. (Atlanta: Atlanta Contemporary Art Center, 2008), 14, 30–33.



18 William T. Williams, American, born 1942

Red Fern, 1979 etching and aquatint printed by Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop, New York 22 5/16 \times 29 15/16 in. (56.7 \times 76 cm) Saint Louis Art Museum, The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection, Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 182:2017

Throughout his career, William T. Williams has developed an approach to abstract art that engages social, cultural, and visual histories along with personal experiences. He often references his childhood, which was spent both in the urban environment of New York City and the rural context of North Carolina. Through his interest in art history, visual culture, and the relationship between color and form, Williams has pushed abstraction formally and conceptually, making work that has continuously evolved.

When Williams enrolled at the Pratt Institute in 1963, he began painting figuratively. However, one of his instructors, Richard Bove, suggested Williams shift toward abstraction. His abstract paintings garnered him enough faculty support to pursue graduate studies at Yale University, where he earned an MFA degree in 1968. While Williams found success in the art world early in his career, he was always interested in supporting other artists, and helped establish the artist-in-residence program at the Studio Museum in Harlem, which remains a core component of the museum's mission.

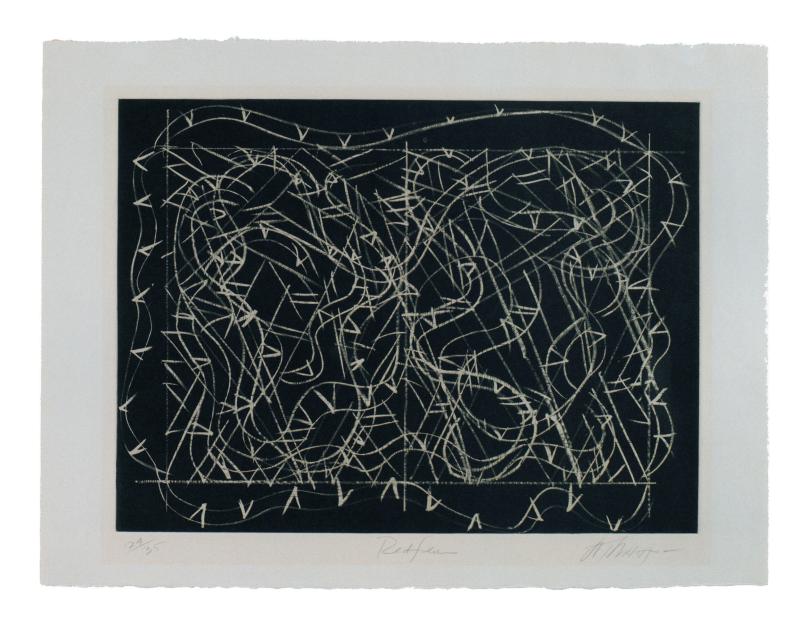
In his own work, Williams uses geometric forms and bold, vibrant colors to create compositions inspired by quilting techniques and motifs, such as diamonds and grids. Williams sees quilt-making and patterning as embodiments of a unique form of African American abstraction, passed down through generations. Williams characterized his own family's patchwork quilts as geometries composed of "rectilinear shapes that were

sewn together." He describes the quilts' patterns as "a stabilizing force, a form that interacts compositionally with what's around it."

In 1975, Robert Blackburn invited Williams to experiment at his Printmaking Workshop (see cat. 2). Over the next two decades, Williams collaborated with Blackburn to produce several unique prints and nineteen editions, including *Red Fern*. In this print, curvilinear forms encircle triangles and vectors studded with thornlike shapes that dance across and around a rectangle with a central dividing line. The movement in the lines and triangles is anchored in geometry. The title references the Redfern housing project in Far Rockaway, Queens, where his family once lived. Williams made several works with the title *Red Fern* or *Redfern*, including some large abstract paintings.

^{1. &}quot;William T. Williams by Mona Hadler," Oral History Project series, *BOMB Magazine*, February 19, 2018, accessed April 12, 2019, https://bombmagazine.org/articles/william-t-williams-by-mona-hadler/.

^{2.} Marshall N. Price, "Paint and Perseverance: The Art of William T. Williams," in William T. Williams: Variations on Themes, exh. cat. (College Park, MD: David C. Driskell Center, 2010), 21.



19 Frank Wimberley, American, born 1926

Journey Signs, 1993
acrylic on canvas with collage
32 × 34 in. (81.3 × 86.4 cm)
Saint Louis Art Museum, The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection,
Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 194:2017

Known for his expressive abstract paintings, Frank Wimberley composes his artworks slowly in many layers. The end products have visible depth and texture as drips, gestural brushstrokes, and scratches activate the composition. While he considers himself an abstract expressionist, his works actively and intentionally expand the boundaries defining that movement. In particular, he creates dimensionality by embedding unconventional materials within the paint.

In 1945 Wimberley enrolled in Howard University in Washington, D.C., after serving in the army during World War II. There, he studied painting under several important African American artists, including James Amos Porter, who authored the first critical examination of African American art history.² Early in his career, Wimberley did not remain bound to the medium of painting. His mother was a ceramicist, and he became interested in pottery and sculpture. While he moved away from ceramics, he would continue to think about his work as existing across media and dimensions.

Wimberley's career followed a trajectory of escalating experimentation with materials and methods. In the 1970s, he began making collages, which allowed him to use dimensional and textural elements, embedding items such as cardboard, cloth, and metal into these works. He continued to use collage throughout his career, such as in *Vaulted* and *Siempre* (Always)

(checklist 78 and 80), which are made of thick paper layered with paint and printed texts that add depth and dimension.

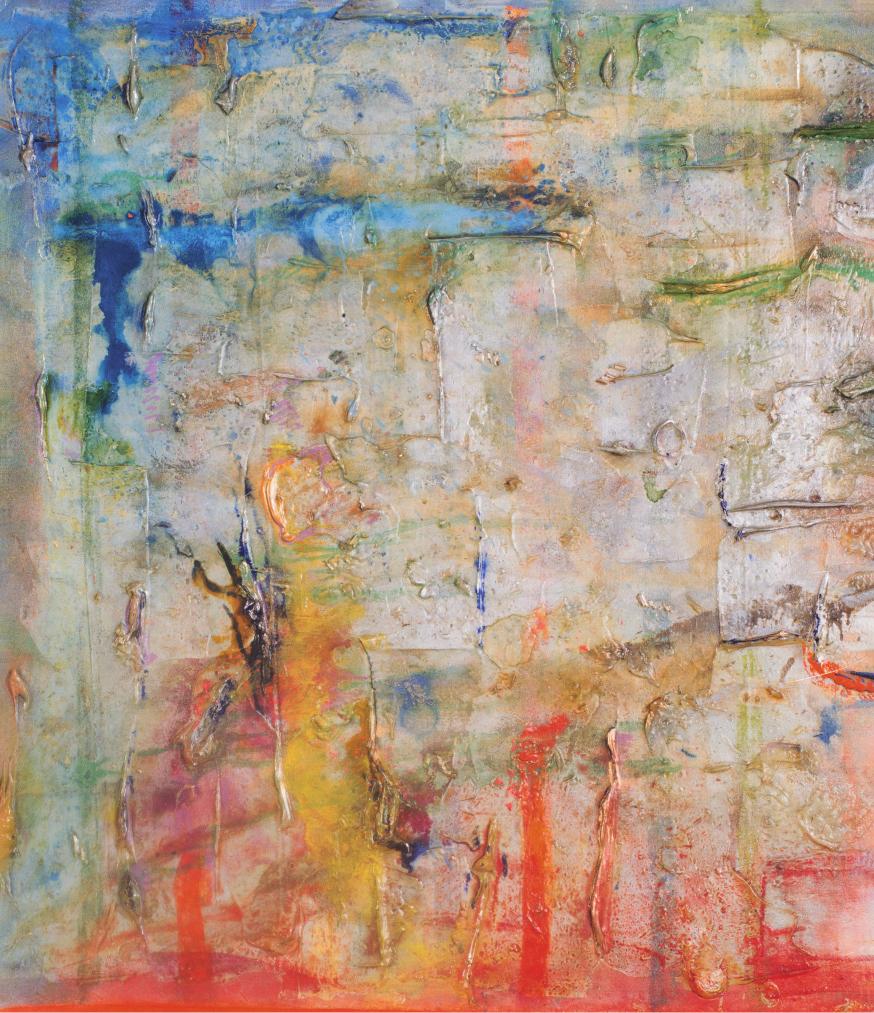
Wimberley also layered found materials into his paintings, allowing a sculptural sensibility to inform his artistic process, as in *Journey Signs*. Here he applied thick pigment over added material elements, their textures still visible beneath the paint. He also scratched into the layers of the paint to add texture and dripped dilute acrylic paint over the canvas. In the 1980s Wimberley shifted from using oil paint to acrylic, a medium that allowed him to build up even more paint on the canvas surface. It is this combination of materiality and gesture that makes Wimberley's paintings so unique. As he explained in 2007, "I like turning materials upside down and inside out. The work takes off in a different direction."³

^{1.} Jim Richard Wilson, Frank Wimberley: 35 Year Overview, exh. cat. (Albany, NY: Opalka Gallery, 2004), 9.

^{2.} Lisa N. Peters, "Berry Campbell announces its representation of Frank Wimberley," *artdaily.org*, July 11, 2018, accessed March 23, 2019, http://artdaily.com/news/106077/Berry-Campbell-announces-its-representation-of-Frank-Wimberley-#.XIKz5SJKiUl.

^{3.} Elizabeth Fasolino, "From Here to There," *East Hampton Star* (March 1, 2007).





Checklist of the Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection

Paper is the support for all works unless otherwise identified. For works on paper the sheet dimensions are given.

The full credit line for all works is Saint Louis Art Museum, The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection, Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie.

Terry Adkins, American, 1953-2014

1. *Untitled*, 1979; ink and gouache with graphite; 40×25 in. $(101.6 \times 63.5 \text{ cm})$; 114:2017 (cat. 1)

Benny Andrews, American, 1930-2006

- 2. Black Bird, 1980; lithograph; printed by Springraphics, New York; $30 \times 22 \text{ 1/16}$ in. $(76.2 \times 56 \text{ cm})$; 117:2017
- 3. *Glider*, 1980; lithograph; printed by Springraphics, New York; $30 \times 22 \ 3/16$ in. $(76.2 \times 56.4 \ cm)$; 116:2017
- 4. Turtle Dove, 1980; lithograph; printed by Springraphics, New York; 29 $7/8 \times$ 22 3/8 in. $(75.9 \times 56.8 \text{ cm})$; 115:2017

Ellsworth Ausby, American, 1942-2011

5. Meditation in Blue, 1998; acrylic; $22 \times 29 \text{ 7/8}$ in. (55.9 \times 75.9 cm); 118:2017

Hugh Bell, American, 1927-2012

- 6. Hot Jazz, 1954, printed 1990; gelatin silver print; 19 7/8 × 23 3/4 in. (50.5 × 60.3 cm); 120:2017
- 7. Mambo at the Palladium, 1966, possibly printed later; gelatin silver print; 20 5/8 \times 15 7/8 in. (52.4 \times 40.3 cm); 119:2017

Robert Blackburn, American, 1920-2003

8. Faux Pas, 1960; lithograph; published and printed by the artist; $30 \times 22 1/8$ in. (76.2 \times 56.2 cm); 121:2017 (cat. 2)

Chakaia Booker, American, born 1953

9. Untitled, 2014; woodcut and lithograph with chine collé; published by James E. Lewis Museum of Art Foundation, Inc., Baltimore, printed by Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop, New York; 28 9/16 \times 20 5/16 in. (72.5 \times 51.6 cm); 122:2017 (cat. 3)

Frank Bowling, British, born Guyana, 1936

10. Fishes, Wishes and Star Apple Blue, 1992; acrylic on canvas; $39 \ 1/2 \times 40 \ \text{in}$. (100.3 × 101.6 cm); 187:2017 (cat. 4)

Winston Branch, British, born Saint Lucia, 1947

11. III, 2001; gouache and oil; 22 \times 29 5/8 in. (55.9 \times 75.2 cm); 123:2017

Nanette Carter, American, born 1954

12. Slightly Off Keel #60, 1999; oil on Mylar; 35 $7/8 \times 36$ 1/16 in. (91.1 \times 91.6 cm); 124:2017 (cat. 5)

Ed Clark, American, born 1926

- 13. *Untitled*, 1968; acrylic; 19 $1/2 \times$ 19 1/4 in. (49.5 × 48.9 cm); 125:2017
- 14. *Untitled*, 1969; acrylic and dry pigment; $22 \frac{1}{8} \times 27 \frac{1}{2}$ in. (56.2 × 69.9 cm); 126:2017 (cat. 6)
- 15. *Untitled*, 1972; etching and aquatint; 22 $1/8 \times 29$ 11/16 in. (56.2 \times 75.4 cm); 129:2017
- 16. Yucatan Series, 1977; etching and aquatint; 22 $3/8 \times 29 7/8$ in. (56.8 \times 75.9 cm); 128:2017
- 17. Untitled (Bahia Series), 1988; dry pigment; 29 3/8 × 39 3/4 in. (74.6 × 101 cm); 127:2017
- 18. Untitled (Bahia Series), 1988; dry pigment and acrylic; 29 3/8 × 32 3/4 in. (74.6 × 83.2 cm); 130:2017
- 19. Untitled (China Series), n.d.; dry pigment; 13 3/16 × 9 15/16 in. (33.5 × 25.2 cm); 131:2017

Adger Cowans, American, born 1936

- 20. Harlem Snow, 1960–61, possibly printed later; gelatin silver print; 36×24 in. (91.4 \times 61 cm); 132:2017
- 21. Untitled (Black Umbrellas), 1961, possibly printed later; gelatin silver print; 20×30 in. (50.8×76.2 cm); 133:2017

Alonzo Davis, American, born 1942

22. Rock Steady, 1992; collage of cut and woven paper with paint; 30 $1/4 \times 22 1/8$ in. (76.8 \times 56.2 cm); 134:2017 (cat. 7)

Lamerol A. Gatewood, American, born 1954

23. Untitled No. 02-038, 2002; oil; 19 3/4 × 25 7/8 in. (50.2 × 65.7 cm); 135:2017

Herbert Gentry, American, 1919–2003

- 24. *Untitled*, 1971; ink; 18 × 14 15/16 in. (45.7 × 37.9 cm); 148:2017
- 25. *Untitled*, 1971; ink; 18 × 14 15/16 in. (45.7 × 37.9 cm); 149:2017
- 26. *Untitled*, 1974; graphite; 14 15/16 \times 18 in. (37.9 \times 45.7 cm); 146:2017
- 27. Untitled, 1974; graphite; 14 15/16 × 18 in. (37.9 × 45.7 cm); 147:2017
- 28. *Untitled*, 1979; ink; 9 13/16 × 7 3/4 in. (24.9 × 19.7 cm); 145:2017
- 29. Untitled, 1983; ink; 8 $3/16 \times 11 3/8$ in. (20.8 × 28.9 cm); 144:2017
- 30. *Untitled*, 1985; ink; 10 $1/2 \times 8 1/4$ in. (26.7 × 21 cm); 143:2017
- 31. *Today*, 1987; screenprint; printed by Atelier Arte, Malmö, Sweden; 9 $13/16 \times 13 \times 1/16$ in. (25 × 34.8 cm); 140:2017
- 32. Yesterday, 1987; screenprint; printed by Atelier Arte, Malmö, Sweden; 9 13/16 × 13 11/16 in. (25 × 34.8 cm); 139:2017
- 33. *Untitled*, 1988; ink; 12 1/4 × 9 1/2 in. (31.1 × 24.1 cm); 141:2017
- 34. *Untitled*, 1988; ink; 11 $3/8 \times 8$ 1/4 in. (28.9 × 21 cm); 142:2017
- 35. *Ici* (*Here*), 1989; watercolor and gouache; 29 11/16 \times 22 1/8 in. (75.4 \times 56.2 cm); 153:2017
- 36. Our Talk, c.1989; watercolor and gouache; 22 $3/8 \times 30$ in. (56.8 \times 76.2 cm); 152:2017
- 37. Our Web, 1990; watercolor and gouache; 29 $1/2 \times 22 1/4$ in. (74.9 \times 56.5 cm); 151:2017 (cat. 8)
- 38. With Us, c.1990–92; acrylic on canvas mounted on mat board; 11×8 in. $(27.9 \times 20.3 \text{ cm})$; 137:2017
- 39. Together with Friends, 1991; screenprint; 20 11/16 × 15 3/8 in. (52.5 × 39 cm); 138:2017

- 40. Three Kings, 1993; etching and aquatint; printed by Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop, New York; 22 $3/16 \times 30$ in. $(56.4 \times 76.2 \text{ cm})$; 136:2017
- 41. The One/Trois Amis (Three Friends), 1997–98; watercolor and gouache; 24×18 in. (61 \times 45.7 cm); 150:2017

Sam Gilliam, American, born 1933

- 42. Half Circle Red, 1975; acrylic on canvas; $78 \times 33 \times 6$ in. (198.1 \times 83.8 \times 15.2 cm); 189:2017a,b (cat. 9)
- 43. Golden Neck, 1993–94; screenprint, offset lithograph, and hand-applied acrylic with stitching; published and printed by Brandywine Workshop, Philadelphia; irregular: 43 $5/16 \times 30$ in. (110 \times 76.2 cm); 154:2017
- 44. Hav-a-Tampa 15, 1995; screenprint and monoprint with stitching; published by Berghoff-Cowden Editions, New Port Richy, FL; irregular: 33 15/16 \times 28 11/16 in. (86.2 \times 72.9 cm); 155:2017
- 45. Lightning Bolt!, 1997; screenprint with paint; irregular: $26 7/8 \times 26 1/2$ in. $(68.3 \times 67.3 \text{ cm})$; 156:2017
- 46. Ruby and Ossie, 2000; acrylic on plywood with metal hardware; $58 1/2 \times 23 1/2 \times 10$ in. $(148.6 \times 59.7 \times 25.4 \text{ cm})$; 188:2017

LeRoy Henderson, American, born 1936 47. *Black Ballerina*, 1992; gelatin silver print; 24 × 19 5/8 in. (61 × 49.8 cm);

48. Untitled (Portrait of Romare

Bearden), n.d.; gelatin silver print; 13 7/8
× 10 7/8 in. (35.3 × 27.7 cm); 157:2018

Bill Hutson, American, born 1936

158:2017

- 49. Ebco Na, 1990; offset lithograph with acrylic; printed by Brandywine Workshop, Philadelphia; 29 $3/4 \times 21 1/2$ in. (75.6 × 54.6 cm); 161:2017
- 50. Ebco Na, 1990–91; offset lithograph with acrylic; printed by Brandywine Workshop, Philadelphia; $29 1/2 \times 21 1/2$ in. $(74.9 \times 54.6 \text{ cm})$; 159:2017
- 51. Ebco Na, 1990–91; offset lithograph with acrylic; printed by Brandywine Workshop, Philadelphia; 29 7/8 × 21 7/16 in. (75.9 × 54.5 cm); 160:2017 (cat. 10)

Ronald Joseph, American, born Saint Kitts and Nevis, 1910–1992

52. *Untitled* (3), n.d.; ink and gouache; 11 × 7 3/4 in. (27.9 × 19.7 cm); 162:2017

Jacob Lawrence, American, 1917–2000 53. Morning Still Life, 1976; screenprint; printed by Soho Graphic Arts Workshop, New York; 25 1/2 \times 19 1/4 in. (64.8 \times 48.9 cm); 163:2017

Norman Lewis, American, 1909–1979 54. *Untitled*, c.1940s; ink; 20 1/4 × 13 in. (51.4 × 33 cm); 166:2017

- 55. *Untitled*, 1949; graphite; $24 \times 187/8$ in. (61 × 47.9 cm); 165:2017
- 56. *Untitled*, 1966; oil; 18 × 24 in. (45.7 × 61 cm); 167:2017 (cat. 11)
- 57. Togetherness, 1973; etching; printed by Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop, New York; 16 13/16 × 19 11/16 in. (42.7 × 50 cm); 164:2017

James Little, American, born 1952

58. Study for the Surrogate, 2002; watercolor with graphite; 16 $3/16 \times 19 7/8$ in. (41.1 \times 50.5 cm); 168:2017

59. Double Exposure, 2008; oil and wax on canvas; 39×50 in. $(99.1 \times 127 \text{ cm})$; 190:2017 (cat. 12)

Al Loving, American, 1935–2005

60. Mercer Street series VI, 1986; collage of painted and printed papers; $32 \times 29 \, 1/4$ in. (81.3 \times 74.3 cm); 171:2017

- 61. Synthesis I, 1986; lithograph; printed by University of Tennessee, Knoxville; $22 \times 29 3/4$ in. $(55.9 \times 75.6 \text{ cm})$; 169:2017
- 62. Life and Continual Growth, 1988; collage of cut printed paper with acrylic; published and printed by Brandywine Workshop, Philadelphia; 29 11/16 × 32 5/8 in. (75.4 × 82.9 cm); 170:2017
- 63. Zayamaca #4, 1993; collage of cut painted paper mounted on Plexiglas; irregular: $50 1/2 \times 20 1/2 \times 1/4$ in. (128.3 \times 52.1 \times 0.6 cm); 172:2017 (cat. 13)
- 64. Untitled (Septahedron), 1996; acrylic on canvas; 21 × 24 in. (53.3 × 61 cm); 192:2017
- 65. Home #30, 2002; collage of cut painted paper with synthetic resin and paint mounted on Plexiglas; $14 \frac{1}{2} \times 15$ in. (36.8 × 38.1 cm); 191:2017

Allie McGhee, American, born 1941 66. Moon Dust, 1994; acrylic: 22 1/8

66. Moon Dust, 1994; acrylic; 22 $1/8 \times$ 29 7/8 in. (56.2 \times 75.9 cm); 173:2017

Sam Middleton, American, 1927-2015

67. Untitled, 1990; collage of cut and torn printed and painted papers with paint and graphite; 19 $3/8 \times 25$ 1/8 in. $(49.2 \times 63.8$ cm); 174:2017

George Mingo, American, 1950–1996

68. *Untitled*, 1980; oil; 21 5/8 × 30 1/8 in. (54.9 × 76.5 cm); 175:2017

Evangeline Montgomery, American, born 1933

69. Sunset, 1997; offset lithograph and screenprint; published and printed by Brandywine Workshop, Philadelphia; 21 5/8 × 29 13/16 in. (54.9 × 75.7 cm); 176:2017 (cat. 14)

Mary Lovelace O'Neal, American, born 1942

70. City Lights (Prophet with No Tongue), 1988; offset lithograph and screenprint; published and printed by Brandywine Workshop, Philadelphia; irregular: 28 1/8 × 32 1/8 in. (71.4 × 81.6 cm); 177:2017 (cat. 15)

Larry Potter, American, 1925-1966

71. *Untitled*, n.d.; gouache and acrylic; 25 1/2 × 19 1/2 in. (64.8 × 49.5 cm); 178:2017

Frank Stewart, American, born 1949

72. Easter Sunday, 1976, possibly printed later; gelatin silver print; 15 15/16 \times 19 7/8 in. (40.5 \times 50.5 cm); 179:2017

Stanley Whitney, American, born 1946

73. *Untitled*, 1998; graphite; 22×30 in. (55.9 \times 76.2 cm); 180:2017

74. Out into the Open, 2000; acrylic on canvas; 53 1/2 × 60 in. (135.9 × 152.4 cm); 193:2017 (cat. 16)

Jack Whitten, American, 1939-2018

75. *Self-Portrait*, 1993; collage of cut painted paper; irregular: 29 7/8 × 23 in. (75.9 × 58.4 cm); 181:2017 (cat. 17)

William T. Williams, American, born 1942

76. Red Fern, 1979; etching and aquatint; printed by Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop, New York; 22 5/16 × 29 15/16 in. (56.7 × 76 cm); 182:2017 (cat. 18)

Frank Wimberley, American, born 1926

77. Journey Signs, 1993; acrylic on canvas with collage; 32×34 in. $(81.3 \times 86.4 \text{ cm})$; 194:2017 (cat. 19)

- 78. Vaulted, 1994; collage of cut and torn painted and printed papers; irregular: $9 \times 8 \text{ 1/2}$ in. $(22.9 \times 21.6 \text{ cm})$; 186:2017
- 79. *Untitled*, 1997; collage of cut and torn painted papers; irregular: 20 7/16 × 19 13/16 in. (51.9 × 50.3 cm); 185:2017
- 80. Siempre (Always), 1998; collage of cut painted paper with pastel; 22 $1/4 \times 27 1/8$ in. (56.5 × 68.9 cm); 184:2017
- 81. Untitled, 2001; collage of cut and torn painted papers; irregular: $163/4 \times 191/2 \times 5/16$ in. $(42.5 \times 49.5 \times 0.8 \text{ cm})$; 183:2017

Photo Credits

The Saint Louis Art Museum thanks the copyright holders for granting permission to reproduce the images illustrated. Every attempt has been made to trace accurate ownership of copyrighted images in this book. Any errors or omissions are unintentional and should be brought to the attention of the publisher.

Simon Kelly, Ronald Ollie, and Elizabeth Wyckoff, "A Conversation with Ronald Ollie": figs. 1 and 3 Images courtesy of Ron Ollie

Quincy Troupe, "The Shape of Abstraction; for Ron Ollie": Copyright © Quincy Troupe Rehema C. Barber, "Unsung Abstractions, A Legacy Uncovered": fig. 4 © Estate of Herbert Gentry; fig. 5 Image courtesy of Ron Ollie, © Walter A. Giles; fig. 6 © Sam Middleton estate; Courtesy of Spanierman Modern; fig. 7 © June Kelly Gallery / James Little

Catalogue entries: 1 © 2019 the estate of Terry Adkins / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York; 2 © Robert Blackburn; 3 © Chakaia Booker; 4 © Frank Bowling; 5 © Nanette Carter; 6 © Ed Clark; 7 © Alonzo Davis; 8 © Mary Anne Rose and the estate of Herbert Gentry; 9 © Sam Gilliam / David Kordansky Gallery; 10 © Bill Hutson; 11 © Estate of Norman Lewis;

Courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery LLC, New York, NY; 12 © June Kelly Gallery / James Little; 13 © Al Loving; Courtesy the estate of Al Loving and Garth Greenan Gallery, New York; 14 © Evangeline Montgomery; Courtesy the artist Evangeline J. Montgomery and Galerie Myrtis; 15 © Mary Lovelace O'Neal; 16 © Lisson Gallery / Stanley Whitney; 17 © Jack Whitten Estate; Courtesy the Jack Whitten Estate and Hauser & Wirth; 18 © William T. Williams; Courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery LLC, New York, NY; 19 © Frank Wimberley

Details

Cover: Cat. 16, Stanley Whitney, Out into the Open Page 2: Cat. 12, James Little, Double Exposure

Page 7: Cat. 17, Jack Whitten, Self-Portrait

Page 8: Cat. 14, Evangeline Montgomery, Sunset

Pages 22–23: Cat. 11, Norman Lewis, Untitled

Page 62: Cat. 4, Frank Bowling, Fishes, Wishes and Star Apple Blue

